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HERBERT CHAUNCEY:

A MAN

MORE SINNED AGAINST THAN SINNING.

BY

SIR ARTHUR HALLAM ELTON, BART.,

AUTHOR OF "BELOW THE SURFACE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

M.DCCC.LX.

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HERBERT CHAUNCEY:

A MAN MORE SINNED AGAINST THAN
SINNING.

CHAPTER I.

SEVERN BANKS.

ADA LITTLECOT. Strange it is that the mention of that name, even now, sends a thrill of pain through my very heart's core, and deepens the shadows cast by the memory of many griefs and many trials over my declining years. Yes, even now, sitting by my solitary fireside, and looking back over the waves of a stormy life into the quiet days of my youth, her face rises clearly before me, in sweet and delicate purity, not with looks of reproachful bitterness, but of calm, patient, gentle inquiry, and sorrow on my account rather than on hers. I bend my head and medi-

tate in all humility on past transgressions. Then rushes in a tide of manifold recollections. Other faces peer into mine ; other eyes gleam from the darkness ; other thoughts flow through my mind thickly and confusedly : joys long vanished, hopes crushed, aspirations once so keen and ardent, now reduced in the sober judgment of age, to idle, foolish dreams—dreams that must have ended, as they did, in shame, and sorrow, and self-contempt.

My life has not been wholly dark and comfortless. The troubles that have vexed me were, I would fain believe, sent to me in mercy, and have borne their fruit ; but even in the dreariest period, peace and joy came to me from time to time, softly and almost as it were by stealth, lest the burden of trial should have utterly crushed me to the earth, and left me hopeless and desperate.

I am going to relate the principal passages of my earlier life. Is it in order to teach the reader a high moral lesson ? I fear not. Doubtless I would not shrink from the attempt if the labour would be well spent ; but people do not read novels for the sake of edification, and if good is done by a novel, it is because the writer of it takes the reader unawares, and appears all the

while simply to be trying to amuse him. My chief object is a selfish one. I desire to methodize my recollections, and gaze upon the past as upon a clearly delineated map. I am not so sorrowful as to make it a bitter task to muse upon pleasures for ever gone ; neither so hopeless as to make even the recollection of sin an insupportable weight upon the spirit. It is good to search out bygone times, and drink the cup of remembered troubles quietly, to the very dregs.

Sometimes the scenes that I call to mind have such a touch of strangeness, that I marvel whether they could have really and truly occurred. Probably many men could also tell tales as strange, if they made a clean breast of it ; as it is my purpose to do. The student who threw aside works of history, and took to reading romance, "because history was so improbable," expressed himself plausibly. Fiction at the first blush is less strange than truth. What this book contains may not be believed, but that matters little to me. So let me commence without further preface.

It was very unfortunate, but I was not only left an orphan when very young, but lost my

guardian a few years after the death of my parents. He was a kind, though perhaps not very judicious friend, and I loved him tenderly. His death seemed to leave me quite alone in the world. It happened when I was about sixteen years of age, so that I was to some extent capable of taking care of myself; and indeed should have felt myself grossly insulted if any one had breathed a suspicion on that point. But I had now no friend older than myself whom I could consult, and it is a pleasure to consult friends, even though one does not follow their advice. I had no place I could call a home, and this I felt very keenly; though in all honesty I must admit that I was perpetually leaving the home of my guardian whilst he was alive, on one plea or another, sometimes business, sometimes pleasure. But then I knew that there was a home to fall back upon, a kind face to welcome me, a friendly hand to grasp mine, whether my absence had been long or short. Now I had no *locus standi*, as it were, and the pleasure of a week's gaiety in London, or a fortnight's grouse-shooting in Scotland, or a rush up the Rhine, and home by Paris, with or without my guardian's

permission, was really half destroyed. I might go to the North Pole if I liked ; there was nobody to object to it. Before, my little excursions were the more agreeable because I was not always sure my guardian would not be displeased with me.

I had one or two friends, but they were younger than myself; I was, therefore, in rather a lonely condition. It is true that there was Sir Hugh Littlecot, of Severn Banks, Meadshire ; he was no friend of mine, and had never seen either myself or my parents in his life ; but he was my guardian's executor and trustee, and consequently it became his duty to manage my little affairs as well. I believe he did not feel altogether pleased when he was made aware of the fact. It involved, however, small trouble. His solicitors, Messrs. Quickset and Harp, paid for my schooling, and arranged for me to be boarded during the holidays with the head master of my school, providing me also with a handsome allowance of pocket-money, to enable me to amuse myself as I best might. When I say "handsome allowance," I mean handsome for a schoolboy. My whole fortune was only three hundred a year, ample for present

purposes, but not enough to dispense with a profession hereafter.

I had some expectations. There was my cousin, Jeffry Ferris. He was a country squire with a fine estate, Glenarvon, also in Meadshire. But Jeffry Ferris was a man of irregular life, and my father had always forbidden my frequenting his house. It was bad policy in the eyes of the world, but my father never minded that. Jeffry took the matter good-humouredly enough, contenting himself with styling my father “a snivelling methodist,” and rumour said that he would do something for me in his will. Indeed, some went so far as to report that Jeffry had sworn, with an oath which I need not repeat, that the “little rascal,” meaning me, “should come to his house, sooner or later, in spite of all the methodists of Meadshire,” which might betoken a great deal more than met the eye.

Jeffry did not mend his ways, and at the time my story commences, had started for the Continent, in company with a lady who was not his wife. It was said he was very much in her power, for hard living had begun to tell upon his intellect. One other cousin I had, also named

Ferris. He was partner in a bank at Stoke-upon-Avon, absorbed in the pursuit of wealth, and I am sorry to say rather negligent in discharging his duty towards his orphan cousin, Herbert Chauncey, for that is the name I shall call myself.

To return, however, to Sir Hugh Littlecot. For a year or two, Sir Hugh took not the smallest notice of me save through the medium of Messrs. Quickset and Harp. My guardian had saddled him with a task which he had by no means anticipated. He was accordingly exceedingly offended, and vented his first displeasure upon myself. Now whether it was that after awhile it occurred casually to Sir Hugh's mind that any unkindness to myself would not very powerfully affect the equanimity of my deceased guardian, and was rather an unworthy method of wreaking vengeance; or whether it was, as I sometimes thought, that Lady Littlecot, who was the sweetest, gentlest creature that ever breathed, got an inkling of the circumstance and interceded on my behalf, I know not. But so it happened, that when the holidays arrived, just after my sixteenth birthday, and all the school was in the delirious throes of delight usual at that period, I was moodily pacing

up and down under the lime-trees in the play-ground, partly to indulge in melancholy thoughts, partly to escape the obtrusive sympathy of my schoolfellows, when there came a message to me from Dr. Drax, the head master, requiring my attendance in his private room. I hastily summed up in my mind all my recent peccadilloes, great and small, but finding nothing of serious magnitude weighing on my conscience, marched into the doctor's sanctum with tolerable composure.

I was received with unusual courtesy. It reminded me of the occasion when the doctor had summoned me to hear the tidings of my poor guardian's death, and I began to think some fresh calamity had befallen me, but was rather puzzled to conceive what.

"Chauncey, take a seat. You'll find yonder arm-chair comfortable." And he pushed it toward me, removing at the same time a certain painful high-backed chair with long legs, ordinarily occupied by the doctor's baby, into which in the nervous trepidation of the moment I had been endeavouring to introduce myself.—"You'll find the arm-chair comfortable. And now then to business. Here's a letter from Sir Hugh Little-

cot, Baronet, of Severn Banks, which will greatly please you, Chauncey. He invites you to Severn Banks, for a fortnight, Chauncey, during the vacation. A leading man in the county, Chauncey, a leading man. And Severn Banks is a fine place. It's a privilege, my dear young friend, to have such a man as Sir Hugh Littlecot standing *in loco parentis* to you. Take the letter, answer it in your best style, and do not forget to pay the postage. You will start to-morrow, Chauncey, and in case I don't see you again, I wish you good-bye, and a pleasant visit to Severn Banks. Bless you, Chauncey, and make my respects to Sir Hugh."

The doctor had never blessed me before, but I took the compliment meekly, and retired to read and answer the letter. It was rather stiffly worded, but the invitation was distinct and unmistakeable. I must of course go. I sat down at my desk, and after spoiling three or four sheets of Bath post, managed to write a decent sort of reply. Then I returned to the playground, holding my head higher than when I last left it, and blandly made known to the juvenile public the fact of Sir Hugh's proffered hospitality. To tell the truth,

though the invitation itself was very gratifying, I did not particularly enjoy the prospect of availing myself of it. Having, for a lad of my age, mixed very little in society, I felt uncomfortable at the thought of going to a grand place full of grand county people. Besides, though I did not like to admit it, I was awfully afraid of Sir Hugh.

He was reputed to be a perfect gentleman, but a consummate tyrant, especially in his own household. A man of irreproachable morals, but who never forgave an injury, even if it arose from a mistake. Deeply attached to his children, but so anxious for their moral welfare that he had allowed his only son to rot in gaol rather than pay his debts. These may have been exaggerated stories. I am only repeating what was ordinarily said respecting him.

I felt, therefore, a little uneasy on my first arrival at Severn Banks. No one was at home, when the dogcart, in which myself and luggage had been conveyed from Smelterstown, stopped at the lodge-gate. We heard from the lodge-keeper that most of the gentlemen were gone fishing, Sir Hugh was at quarter sessions, and the ladies were driving.

Nevertheless, being in a humble frame of mind, I begged the groom to drive the dogcart round to the stable, and so crept in quietly by the back-door. I narrowly escaped being bitten by a Newfoundland dog, and collared by the under butler, both those individuals mistaking me for a thief or sharper disguised as a young gentleman ; but I at length explained my appearance satisfactorily, and was shown to my room.

Everything at Severn Banks was conducted in the most painfully punctilious and orderly fashion. The servant who attended on me gave me a friendly hint that Sir Hugh was “mainly put out,” unless his guests were all assembled in the drawing-room when the gong sounded for dinner. I accordingly began to make my toilette a full hour before it was necessary, and, as is often the case, was very late in consequence. I loitered and lingered about the room, sometimes busying myself in unpacking, sometimes leaning out of window to watch a group of ladies and gentlemen on the lawn, who were laughing and talking, with what appeared to me the most amazing audacity, right under Sir Hugh’s library window.

I have said I had been hitherto very little in society, and the graceful forms and bright-tinted dresses of the ladies filled me with pleasurable bewilderment. How I envied those men, chattering, and even joking with them, perfectly self-possessed and comfortable. There was one man with a conspicuous pair of moustaches, whom I took to be a hussar; for moustaches were not common in those days. His good-humoured nonchalance especially moved my wonder. What he said I could not hear, but every time he opened his mouth the group of ladies round him appeared gently electrified with amusement, and their delicately melodious laughter floated past me on the evening breeze.

Two or three other men were near him. They had been fishing, and were clad in light shooting coats or blouses. Round their hats was twisted abundance of fishing-tackle, and their boots were as heavy as a ploughman's. But rough as their outward man might be, their bearing was to my schoolboy mind the perfection of aristocratic refinement and easy grace.

Sir Hugh's library window was under mine, and opened upon the lawn. I heard a voice issue

from it, deep, sonorous, but gentle, and felt assured it was Sir Hugh's. The words uttered were commonplace; merely a remark to his guests on the lawn that it wanted but twenty minutes to dinner. But the tone was somewhat remarkable: it was, as I have said, gentle, but for all that, you felt it would be inexpedient not to yield implicit obedience to it.

So thought, as it would seem, the guests on the lawn. They fled, some one way and some another, and disappeared in the house. Scarcely had they vanished when I noticed another figure emerge from the shrubberies. It was a fair, blue-eyed girl of about fourteen years of age, with long sunny ringlets falling over her shoulders. She glided across the soft lawn noiseless as a moonbeam, and presently reached a distant parterre of flowers where she busied herself in gathering a bouquet. She looked so sweet and gentle, and darted so nimbly yet so gracefully from flower to flower as she moved along the border, that my attention became absorbed and time passed by unheeded. On a sudden the dreadful gong boomed upon my ear louder and louder, filling every crevice and corner of the mansion with its abominable

clangour. I rushed from the window and finished dressing with impetuous haste.

It was really a formidable ordeal to enter the spacious dining-room and pass down the long table crowded with guests, all strangers to me, in order to pay my respects and make my apologies to Sir Hugh. Though I was not a good hand at concealing my emotion, I did not want nerve, and went through my task pretty well. The provoking thing was, that the instant I addressed Sir Hugh, I perceived he had never noticed my absence. He was puzzled at first, but presently, understanding how the case stood, shook me by the hand with ceremonious dignity, looked at me in a penetrating sort of way, that made me feel my whole character had been accurately ascertained and carefully “booked” in some corner of his memory; and then, not unkindly, but a little abruptly, directed me to go to the other end of the table and try to find a seat. With countenance growing redder and redder, I hurried round the table, stumbling against the servants who were handing round soup, but failed to find a vacant chair. At the end of the table I noticed, however, a lady of middle age, with a sweet ex-

pression of countenance, who motioned to me to approach. I read encouragement and sympathy in her soft blue eyes, and recovering my presence of mind, steered towards her as towards a haven of repose. It was Lady Littlecot herself. By her side was a handsome girl with a profusion of dark ringlets, whose eyes beamed with merriment and mischief. Good-naturedly she made room for me between herself and Lady Littlecot. The latter only said a few words to me, but the tones of her voice were so kind and gentle that I began to feel more at my ease, and even ventured to take some soup. Clara Lamplugh, the girl who had made room for me, was not many years older than myself, but to my schoolboy eyes appeared quite a woman of the world—a little *blasée*, but dangerously lovely still.

“What courage you must have to walk right up to Sir Hugh and make your apologies face to face! There’s not a man present who would not rather have stormed a battery of cannon! Tell me now—did not your heart sink when you caught his eye?”

I frankly confessed I had been rather frightened.

“I am very glad to hear it; for, you see, true courage does not mean not being afraid: it means not acting as if you were. The great duke is inwardly a coward.”

“What! the Duke of Wellington?”

“Yes. A phrenologist found it out the other day, and the duke confessed he was quite right. He was a born coward, but a hero by strength of will. So were you just now. But you ought to have a glass of wine: it will calm your nerves. Ask me to take wine.”

I did so, and was more and more charmed with my companion’s agreeable qualities. She continued talking.

“How long have you left college?”

“Oh! I am still at school. I am going to college next year, though.”

“Indeed? I thought you were a Balliol man, by your manner. You know I have brothers, and learn a good deal from them about Oxford and Oxford men. So you are really still at school? And what profession are you thinking of? The army?”

“No: the war’s over, and I hate soldiering in peace time: I intend to be a member of Parliament.”

My companion laughed merrily, and I felt a little hurt.

“I don’t see anything to laugh at.”

“Pray forgive me, but it sounded so odd from the lips of a good-looking young man.”

This was too patronizing, and drawing myself up, I replied stiffly, that I had never been much given to boyish amusements. Our school contained many men who were very much in earnest. We had a debating society which met once a week, and there were some really good speakers amongst us: Jackson, junior, was thought to be very like William Pitt.

“How delightful! Now tell me, what was the last subject of discussion?”

“Oh! the question was, ‘Has Christianity on the whole, increased the temporal happiness of the human race?’”

“What a lively debate you must have had! And how was it decided?”

“Well, it was a tough struggle; but Jackson, junior—made a splendid speech, and the ‘Ayes’ had it by a majority of two.”

“You don’t say so. What a relief that would be to the bishop yonder! I must tell him after dinner.”

In this way, dinner passed away pleasantly. When the ladies withdrew I rushed to open the door; but very soon wished I had left the duty to some one else. Each lady, as she gracefully sailed past, appeared to scan me keenly from head to foot; at least, I suspected so, which was much the same thing. I tried to feel at my ease; but a horrible idea seized me that I looked like a waiter, and I blushed till I was crimson.

The gaily dressed throng vanished at last. I returned hastily to the table, where I sat in silence, sipping wines the names of which I did not know, and listening to a warm discussion on the weight of a salmon caught that day after an hour's struggle. The only observation I remember was one from a keen sportsman on my left.

“By Jove, it’s a pity the fellow bled so before we landed him, or he would have weighed thirty pounds instead of twenty-nine. By Jove, it’s a fact.”

This was at my end of the table. Far away at the other end Sir Hugh was talking politics to an admiring circle. In the drawing-room I sought out Clara Lamplugh. She was on the sofa, and there was a vacant place by her side. Encouraged

by the recollection of her affability at dinner, and emboldened by an extra glass of wine, I seated myself beside her, and endeavoured to resume the thread of our conversation. Somehow or other, we did not get on so well as at dinner; that abominable hussar, Captain Blandy, would stick himself near us, and I thought she was afraid of his overhearing us. I had half a mind to propose adjourning with her to the other end of the room. Presently, however, Clara said—

“By-the-by, you were talking of William Pitt at dinner. There is a splendid likeness of him in the ante-room. Just go and look at it, and tell me what you think of it.”

I liked her pretty little positive ways, and started off. When I returned, Clara had vanished from the sofa; but I caught sight of her in the distance retiring into the conservatory on the arm of the detestable Blandy.

I believe my countenance must have presented a very unamiable appearance at that moment. I first thought of challenging Blandy; then turned my attention cursorily to the subject of suicide; but finally, sat down like a sensible young gentleman in a remote corner of the room, and drank a cup of tea.

Lady Littlecot sought me out, and led me to a table covered with drawings and prints. Here I amused myself tolerably for a quarter of an hour, but was beginning to feel sleepy when my shoulder was lightly tapped by a lady's fan. I turned hastily, and beheld the mischievous countenance of Clara Lamplugh smiling down upon me. I was about to rise, and in my best manner haughtily ask what were her commands, when she said gaily :

"Now, don't bear malice. I am come to make my *amende honorable*. Ada Littlecot has just entered the room, and I want to introduce you to her."

I rose somewhat sulkily, but Clara's good-humour soon smoothed my brow, and I followed her like a lamb.

Ada Littlecot was only fourteen or thereabouts, and was dressed accordingly ; that is to say, in the simplest muslin dress, without any ornament but a small bouquet of geraniums in her bosom. Her light brown hair fell in long waving curls over her shoulders. I recognized her at once ; she was the same young girl whom I had seen in the flower-garden before dinner.

Boys of sixteen are much more prone to fall in love with ladies of between thirty and forty than with girls of their own age. I did not feel the slightest *tendresse* for Ada Littlecot, but I thought her a sweet little creature, and commenced conversing with her in a friendly, rather condescending manner.

“Are you fond of riding?”

“Oh, very! But papa does not like my riding Juliette.”

“Who is Juliette?”

“Oh, the bay mare; such a beauty, with such a love of a tail, and a neck always arched. I hope he will let me ride her to-morrow; I am getting too tall for the pony.”

And the young lady glanced at her small person in a mirror near us.

We were continuing our conversation on horses, when I saw my companion’s countenance change. She had been talking and laughing in a gay, thoughtless way, but suddenly looked grave and serious: not that she seemed frightened; it was rather as if she thought it necessary to be on her best behaviour.

“I see papa coming this way,” she said.

Sir Hugh it was. His manner, however, was friendly and kind. There seemed no need to regard him with such awe. Putting his arm in mine, he drew me a little to one side, at the same moment making some almost imperceptible sign to Ada, that sent her swiftly in the direction of her mother, who was seated in the adjoining room.

Sir Hugh talked to me pleasantly, though rather ceremoniously, about my school, my school-fellows, and my schoolmaster. "Drax was a worthy man and a sound scholar." I assented, of course, and he went on to discuss my future plans; laying down the course I ought to pursue, in an affable manner, but without the smallest regard to my own wishes, tastes or inclinations. I did not venture to allude to parliamentary aspirations. I listened to the old man's sonorous, well-rounded sentences, and felt smaller and smaller as he chalked out for me a struggling career, as barrister on the Western Circuit under the wing of an opulent solicitor, who, out of respect for Sir Hugh, would take me by the hand and help me to a few briefs by way of a beginning. "You must not attempt too much," remarked Sir Hugh, encouragingly. "Young men are

apt to think themselves something out of the common. I hope you have too much good sense to do so yourself. And now let us listen to the music."

We rose, and feeling, though I scarce knew why, that Sir Hugh was rather bored, and wished me to decamp, I retreated to another part of the room, and presently made my escape to bed.

CHAPTER II.

ADA LITTLECOT.

THERE were a great many guests staying at Severn Banks, and after my first shyness had worn off I began to enjoy my visit. One has always most liberty in a crowd, and as long as I was out of reach of Sir Hugh, I felt much at my ease. Sir Hugh during the day was seldom seen by his guests; two or three days in the week he was absent from home, and on the days he was at home he was generally secluded in his library. He would ride out occasionally, attired in long Hessian boots, and mounted on a strong built cob, with a Roman nose and a vicious eye. Inquisitive friends affirmed that his ride was only a convenient mode of receiving the homage to which he appeared to consider himself entitled by indefeasible right. Sitting bolt upright on the strong built cob, Sir Hugh proceeded at a slow

pace through the village. Farmers doffed their hats, labouring men bent low in bareheaded humility, women bobbed innumerable curtsies at their cottage-doors, and the children of the village school fled at his approach in speechless consternation. Sir Hugh meanwhile moved on grimly sedate, raising his silver-headed cane to his hat in acknowledgment of the rustic salutations uncouthly tendered to him.

A groom invariably followed him at a long distance; and sometimes Ada rode by his side on a rough Welsh pony. Her sweet countenance and gentle, graceful manner, contrasted curiously with the stern old man, gazing straight before him from under dark, shaggy eyebrows, and holding with a firm grip the reins of his Roman-nosed cob.

Sir Hugh's departure from the house was the signal for me to steal into the library, and with a degree of fear and trembling that gave zest to my enjoyment, I rummaged over books, old and new, and portfolios of prints, rare and costly, which Sir Hugh had probably forgotten were in his possession. At other times I joined the guests in their diversions at home or abroad. Blandy and myself soon made it up; he was a very

good-natured fellow, and won my heart by asking me to smoke a cigar with him in the conservatory after the company had retired for the night. We smoked there every night, under the plea of exterminating the red spiders on the rose-trees. When, however, the drawing-room itself began to be pervaded by a chronic odour of Manilla cheroots, Lady Littlecot in her gentle way informed us that of the two evils, tobacco smoke and spiders, she preferred the latter; so Blandy and myself waited till the servants had gone to bed, and then took refuge in the kitchen, where we smoked, sitting in our shirt-sleeves at a temperature of 80 degrees.

Blandy initiated me into the mysteries of fly-fishing. I do not think I made much progress. The story of the bleeding salmon, absurd as it may seem, gave me rather a distaste for the sport; but it looked unmanly not to join the fishing-party, and I did so now and then. The stream mostly frequented by us was broad and rather rapid, full of occasional pits, and here and there bristling with stakes. I had no idea of not doing the same as others, so I whipped the stream with Blandy's rod, up to my waist in water, accoutred

in Blandy's huge patent fishing-boots, warranted waterproof, and obtained the reputation of being an ardent lover of the gentle art. I never caught a fish, but Blandy managed to slip two or three into my basket just to save my credit.

One day, however, my adventures nearly came to an abrupt termination. Wading down the stream, rod in hand, I walked suddenly into a dangerous pit, of which I had been warned before, but which I had forgotten. It was not a mere hole, but a long, deep channel, or gully, in the bottom of the stream. I plunged in and disappeared from sight. My patent waterproof fishing boots did their duty admirably, for my feet and legs emerged from the water buoyant as corks; but the drawback was that my head remained under water: the spectators on the bank were therefore entertained with the interesting spectacle of a pair of legs clad in huge boots floating down the stream, heels in the air. I righted myself at last, and swam a few strokes till I got a footing, and with the aid of friends, plodded to the bank, where I lay down in a state of utter exhaustion, and had to be carried home. I have never gone out fishing since.

Next day the party at Severn Banks broke up. Sir Hugh also left home for a day and night: he was to preside at a public meeting in a distant part of the country. There were only Lady Littlecot, Ada, and myself left; and we spent a happy day.

Lady Littlecot's great treat was to dine early, and an early dinner was accordingly always the rule when Sir Hugh was absent. It was a singular contrast—this early dinner in an upstairs apartment that had once been the schoolroom—to the grand entertainment in the long dining-room which I had been accustomed to. The schoolroom was of moderate size, and plainly furnished; the walls were hung with maps and scriptural prints, and a bookcase full of seedy lesson books was in one corner. There was a picture in the room of considerable merit, and worthy of a more conspicuous locality: it was an oil painting of a young lad playing with a little child. The drawing of the picture was bold and graceful, the colouring rich and soft: the character of the boy's face evidently true to nature—a high-spirited, joyous lad; that of the child was of course less individualized; a little thing with sweet baby

features and a shower of sunny tresses. I asked Lady Littlecot whether the child was Ada; but I had no sooner spoken than I regretted it. A shadow passed over Lady Littlecot's face, and her eyes filled with tears. The child was Ada, the lad was her brother; who had died in a debtor's prison a few years since. Great had been the rejoicings and splendid the festivities when he came of age; but whilst the recollection of them was still fresh in the minds of friends and neighbours, darker and sadder scenes followed and blotted it out for ever. I blamed myself for my want of tact, and managed in a clumsy way to change the subject.

We had a pleasant meal: the sunshine streamed into the quiet schoolroom through the chinks of the Venetian blinds, and the great house was perfectly still. Dinner was served on a round table; a few simple dishes, with abundance of fruit and every variety of cake and biscuit. I never had seen Lady Littlecot so happy: she looked ten years younger; she talked and laughed with Ada and myself, and amused us with tales of other days.

She was a simple-minded lady, fond of home and home pursuits; averse to the bustle of fashion-

able life ; with deep religious instincts, yet of a cheerful, happy temper. I suppose she married Sir Hugh more in obedience to the commands of others than out of true affection. If she loved him, it was certain she feared him a great deal more. The daughter was a curious link between them : with all her awe for Sir Hugh she evidently clung to her father affectionately.

After dinner we took a long drive to see a ruined abbey. We climbed up the shattered stairs and groped along mouldering, grass-grown corridors and galleries, until we were thoroughly tired. In any other company I should have been dull, but as it was, I had seldom felt so happy. Home was a word scarcely known to me, except in books of fiction ; I had lived chiefly amongst boys and men. The gentle society of the mother and her daughter seemed to wrap me in dreamy tranquillity. Ada, gliding amongst those gaunt ruins, looked like a fairy weaving a mystic spell. I could almost fancy that with a wave of her little hand she could restore to pristine beauty and perfection the roofless ruins piled around us. Then my thoughts took a more prosaic turn. I wished Ada were my sister, that I might be always her

friend and companion as now. More than that I neither imagined nor desired.

As soon as we reached home, tea was served in the schoolroom. Afterwards Ada took me to see her horse. As already intimated, Sir Hugh rarely allowed her to ride Juliette; for Juliette was considered too spirited. Ada rode her on stated occasions, after the animal had been mulcted of half its corn and exercised till it was in a dejected frame of mind; when the coachman rode by her side with a leading-rein. At other times she was restricted to the little Welsh pony.

Rough and austere as Sir Hugh might be, it was evident that he was painfully nervous about his daughter. The family apothecary called once a week as regularly as clockwork, merely to ascertain whether Ada was in good health. Her dress and dietary were matters of most rigid regulation: "What to eat, drink, and avoid," was legibly written out in a memorandum book by Sir Hugh himself, and committed to Lady Littlecot's charge with as much solemnity as if the contents were sacred. On most days, save during settled summer weather, a little pencil note in Sir Hugh's handwriting, was sent up to Lady

Littlecot, by the hands of the French valet Alphonse, containing such instructions as these : "Wind N. E. Ada to wear her cloth jacket." Or, "There will be rain. Cork boots." Or, "Wind S. E. A black frost. Muff and fur cloak." Or, "Sky doubtful. Umbrella instead of parasol."

But to return to Juliette, the bay mare. Ada took me to the stable door, but no farther ; she herself not being allowed to enter. The groom was inside, and I was duly introduced to Juliette. She was a pretty creature, and the groom seeing my admiration, and stimulated by a tip of half-a-crown which I very unnecessarily presented to him, proposed that I should mount her and take her a canter round the park. I could not assent without Ada's permission, but this was soon obtained. Next to riding Juliette herself, was the pleasure of seeing some one else do so. So in a few minutes I was careering round the park, showing off my horsemanship and Juliette's fine qualities to my heart's content, and also Ada's. She sat under one of the trees for a few minutes watching me ; her mother joined her. Presently, a third figure made its appear-

ance. A sudden alarm seized me. Was it Sir Hugh?

Reining in the mare with difficulty, she gradually subsided into a walk, and thus in rather undignified plight I turned her head homewards, and approached the ladies at a foot's pace. When I came near, the third figure slowly withdrew, and I recognized it was not Sir Hugh, but Sir Hugh's valet, the Frenchman Alphonse. I felt mortified and annoyed at having experienced so unnecessary a panic, and was about to resume my equestrian performances, when Lady Littlecot made a sign to me to approach. I found she was flurried and disturbed; Ada also looked uncomfortable, and they both suggested that it was time to go indoors.

In the course of the evening, I ascertained that this valet—a great favourite of Sir Hugh's, and, like most favourites, exceedingly pert and domineering—had actually ventured to protest against the permission given me to ride Juliette, reminding Lady Littlecot that Sir Hugh was likely to be much displeased if it came to his ears.

I had taken a dislike to Alphonse from the first. He was a little wiry, swarthy, handsome French-

man, who gave himself airs beyond endurance. Indeed I had once detected him in the act of shrugging his shoulders contemptuously when I was trying to help a dish that was new to me. Of course I dismounted and put up the mare; but the scene with Alphonse cast a damp over the party for most of the evening.

At ten, Lady Littlecot made an effort to rally the spirits of the party, and ringing the bell, said to the butler, "And now, Thompson, bring the raspberry wine, with hot water and sugar, and don't forget the almond cakes."

After supper Lady Littlecot read prayers to the servants, a practice she seldom omitted; though neither the guests nor Sir Hugh were aware of it, since she retired to the unfrequented school-room for the purpose.

Sir Hugh was home early next day. I heard his library bell ring, and met Alphonse hastening along the passage with an air of unusual importance. Then the bell rang again. I retired to the billiard-room, but had not been there long before there came another ring of the library bell. It was becoming disagreeable: was anything the matter?

As I passed down the broad passage with which

the library communicated, Ada Littlecot issued from the library, and darted past me with raised colour and streaming eyes. I became more and more uncomfortable; but my discomfort reached its climax, when the awful library bell rang once more, and the butler soon after informed me that I was wanted by Sir Hugh.

Mustering courage, I stepped into the room: he was seated in his arm-chair, dressed in his high Hessian boots, holding himself very upright.

I sat down on a chair to which he pointed.

"Mr. Herbert Chauncey, I have a question to ask you."

I bowed my reddening face in silence.

"You rode the bay mare, Juliette, yesterday evening?"

"Only a gallop in the park, sir," I replied. "I did not know there was any harm."

"Did I say there was?" rejoined Sir Hugh grimly.

There was a pause: then he resumed,—

"Who gave you leave to do so?"

This was an awkward question. I replied, after some minutes' hesitation, that it was all my fault; nobody but myself was to blame, &c.

“ Ada has informed me that she gave you permission. Is that true ? ”

I was obliged to assent. There was another pause.

Then Sir Hugh, waving his hand with ceremonious courtesy towards the door, dismissed me with a sort of verdict of acquittal, as follows :—

“ Mr. Herbert Chauncey, having carefully investigated this unpleasant business, I do not find that you have been guilty of any worse delinquency than schoolboy thoughtlessness. You may retire.”

I longed to say something in behalf of Ada, but the words stuck in my throat, and I found myself outside the door before I could collect my thoughts.

That day Lady Littlecot did not make her appearance at dinner, although two or three neighbouring gentry with their wives and daughters were Sir Hugh’s guests. As for Ada, I believe she was imprisoned in her bedroom. It was by no means an agreeable party. Everybody seemed aware that something unpleasant had occurred, and avoided looking in each other’s faces, lest Sir Hugh should read their thoughts. After dinner the men drank enough port wine to have

laid a dozen country squires of the present generation under the table; and their jollity at length succeeded in dispelling the general gloom. Sir Hugh, however, preserved his gravity, gazing stern and stolid as a weather-beaten statue on the uncouth merriment of his guests. I felt his eye was on me, and drank my wine by stealth, adding water ostentatiously when I found I was observed. The sitting seemed interminable. At last I made an effort, and, quietly escaped through the adjacent door.

I ran into the garden, glad to be rid of the noise and heat of the dining-room. It was a fine, soft evening; and, wandering on, I reached the drive leading from the stable. Presently I heard voices. Pursuing my way I came upon a group that excited my interest—a mounted groom leading the bay mare Juliette, and by the side of Juliette poor Ada, without her hat, fondly embracing the animal's neck, with sobs and tears. The groom, in a rough but kindly voice, was begging his young mistress not to "take on so;" that "she would have a much finer horse very soon, trust him for that," &c.

The fact was, as soon as Sir Hugh learned

that Ada had taken the unpardonable liberty of permitting me to ride the horse specially provided for her use by Sir Hugh, he had given orders there and then that Juliette should be taken to the nearest town and sold by auction for what she would fetch.

It was a harsh measure, and tears of indignation sprang to my eyes; but what could I do? Sir Hugh was omnipotent in his little sphere of Severn Banks, and I was helpless. I caressed Juliette and denounced Sir Hugh's tyranny. But the groom was pressed for time; and, grunting inarticulate sympathy, he touched his hat and rode slowly away with Juliette by his side. We watched him till he disappeared with his horses amongst the wooded undulations of the park, Ada weeping bitterly all the time.

I had not had much experience in administering comfort. At school the only consolation I had imparted was to young Lord Folliott—"Folly," we used to call him—after he had been thrashed in a stand-up fight. The consolation consisted in telling him that he would thrash his adversary in another month, and teaching him how to do it. The case of Ada was new to me; she was too old

to be soothed by sweetmeats or pacified by a doll. Nevertheless she continued crying. What was to be done?

My heart bled for her, and everybody says, pity is akin to love. I found it so then. The drive where we were standing was quiet and retired. No one was near us ; I longed to throw myself on my knees at Ada's feet, and declare myself passionately attached to her.

But youths hovering on the verge of manhood are apt to be shy on such emergencies, and I could not muster up courage to do anything so decisive. At length, however, with my eyes full of tears, I exclaimed,—

“ Dear Miss Ada, pray don't cry so. You will break my heart : you will indeed ! ” The sound of my own voice emboldened me. The young girl's face was hid in her hands. I leaned forward, uttered a few incoherent words of which “ love ” was one, and seizing her hand, was about to cover it with kisses ; but my courage failed.

I doubt whether this abrupt expression of feeling was perfectly appreciated ; but it had one salutary effect—it stopped Ada's tears. Half frightened, and a good deal astonished, she stood

motionless for a few seconds, then, blushing crimson, snatched away her hand, and ran full speed up the drive, and into the house.

When I joined the company in the drawing-room, I felt much more at my ease than I had done heretofore. I had entered into the serious business of life ; I had made something very like a formal declaration of love. True, it was rather a premature, not to say audacious, proceeding in a young gentleman not seventeen, of very moderate expectations ; but I did not look at the matter from that point of view. I fancied myself suddenly raised in the scale of creation, and lounged about the room with an air of a man of the world, occasionally making remarks in an easy tone of voice more or less to the purpose.

I believe the change in my manner from my previous reserve and shyness was so conspicuous that some of the country squires fancied I was elated by wine, and nudged each other, chuckling audibly every time I spoke or moved.

I did not care ; even Sir Hugh's awful presence was less overpowering than heretofore. I returned his stately pressure of the hand on parting for the night, with a warmth which rather surprised him.

I began to regard him as my possible father-in-law, and felt it my duty to treat him with some show of affection. All this was very absurd; but I was young: and even grave, middle-aged men are foolish enough sometimes under the influence of the tender passion.

Next morning greatly cooled my enthusiasm, but it did not extinguish it; on the contrary, my thoughts began to assume shape. I pictured myself, as a high-spirited youth, poor in worldly wealth, but rich in intellectual gifts, devoting myself to succour and console the lovely daughter of an unnatural—nay, slightly demoniacal father. Her mother, I felt assured, secretly approved my suit, that is to say, if she was aware of it, which was certainly doubtful.

It is not difficult to understand how Ada and myself, in this half-real half-ideal sort of way, enacted an innocent, romantic love-story. How we made solemn assignations to meet at moonlight, half a mile off, which neither of us ever kept nor meant to keep. How we took stealthy walks in the kitchen-garden, talking sentiment at first, but speedily diverging to the practical business of common life by making an onslaught on the gooseberry and currant bushes. How we sat

hand in hand in the breakfast-room or schoolroom, talking over future plans with the greatest gravity, until, having exhausted the subject, we took to playing with Lady Littlecot's lapdog, or fell back upon battledore and shuttlecock. The thrill of mingled anguish and pleasure was great when an approaching step, or a voice coming nearer and nearer, drove us in wild precipitation from the room; I going one way, Ada another, to meet again a few hours after with looks of smiling self-consciousness.

One day, however, a circumstance occurred that brought our pleasant little drama to a dismal termination. I have alluded once or twice to Alphonse, Sir Hugh's French valet. The small, wiry, dark-eyed foreigner did not like me, and I did not like him. He had been taken up by Sir Hugh a few years since, for what reason matters not much, but it had some connection with Sir Hugh's deceased son. I believe Alphonse had been his servant; at all events, I surprised the man one day standing before the lad's picture in the schoolroom, gazing at it stedfastly with an expression of so much sorrow in his countenance, that for the moment my heart rather softened towards him.

Sir Hugh patronized the man in a dignified way, and perhaps imagined that by so doing he evinced a forgiving spirit towards the poor lad who had died so miserably in a debtor's prison. The occasional kindness of stiff, hard-headed, disagreeable people, say what we will, goes farther than that of the uniformly good and gracious, and it is probable that Alphonse really loved the stern old man: he, at least, took upon himself the airs of a devoted servitor, and the privileges of a favourite dependant.

Both Ada and myself entertained a disagreeable suspicion that the man's eye was always upon us, as if he read our secret thoughts, and was plotting our discomfiture.

My dismay may, therefore, be readily conceived when one afternoon, sallying forth for a walk, I was intercepted in the ante-room opening into the entrance-hall by Ada Littlecot, pale as marble, and seemingly too much agitated even to shed tears.

“Herbert, he has got the letter—the letter with the lock of hair! he will show it to papa—papa will never forgive me!”

To explain this, I must admit that I had been

guilty of a little indiscretion. I had persuaded Ada with much difficulty to give me a lock of her hair. Now, instead of simply presenting it to me on a favourable occasion, it was arranged —inexperienced lovers as we were—that she should place it in a letter, carefully seal it up, and convey it to me through the medium of a maid-servant. To hand it to me herself would have been too obvious and commonplace a proceeding. What was love without a little mystery and abundance of stratagem?

But the result was this: Alphonse, the hateful Alphonse, had contrived to get hold of the letter, and would not give it up, though the maid declared she had implored him to do so, kneeling on her knees in the butler's pantry for full twenty minutes; which, of course, was a lie, my conviction being that Alphonse and the woman were sworn friends and accomplices.

What was to be done? Ada, to do her justice, thought more of me than of herself, and in tones of agonizing entreaty begged me to fly from the house before her father returned. Of course my boyish chivalry recoiled from the idea. After all, I had not committed burglary or homicide. No:

I had no idea of taking flight. Another course of policy suggested itself; I would waylay Alphonse, and coax or terrify him into giving up the letter. Ada, at my instigation, fled to her mother for comfort and protection.

But Alphonse was not to be cajoled or intimidated by a young gentleman of sixteen. He met all my solicitations, all my remonstrances, with contemptuous shrugs of the shoulder and aggravating little outbursts of sneering laughter. I had managed to decoy him into the billiard-room, opening by glass doors into the garden, where I thought we should not be liable to interruption; and the provoking thing was that, to the best of my belief, I could actually see the identical letter protruding from the breast pocket of his coat. An English lad of my age could probably thrash most Frenchmen in a pugilistic encounter, and I determined to make a bold push for the letter. Aided in my resolution by his insulting looks and gestures, I made a sudden rush, and pounced at the breast pocket; but Alphonse was quick and active as a Red Indian; he sprang back, and eluded my grasp: I missed the letter, however, only by the fraction of an inch. The man's swarthy

face was distorted with rage; his black eyes glared; he foamed; he sputtered; he vociferated; he gesticulated like a maniac; then seizing a billiard cue, swore, if I dared to approach, "*qu'il ferait sauter mes yeux de ma tête.*" The rage of a Frenchman is rather startling to an English schoolboy. I was a little taken aback, and attempted to parley; but at that juncture, a face and form appeared at the glass door communicating with the garden, which brought matters speedily to a crisis. It was Sir Hugh Littlecot. Apparently he had been gazing at the scene for some minutes; more amazed than angry, the old man shook the door to signify he wished it to be opened. I had locked it previous to meeting Alphonse.

As soon as he was in the room, Alphonse, throwing aside the billiard cue, commenced an impassioned harangue in French, a language I understood no better than most school-boys of the period, and finally with an air of high-minded fidelity presented Sir Hugh with my poor little Ada's letter. I was aware that nothing could be done, and stood by in sullen silence. Sir Hugh's countenance grew black as night; he

took the letter and tore it open : out dropped a long silken, flaxen curl upon the green surface of the billiard-table. I now attempted to say something by which I might monopolize the blame of the transaction ; but Sir Hugh bade me hold my peace, and retire to my bedroom.

I waited there a full hour, listening to the library bell, which, as on a previous occasion, rang with chilling solemnity at intervals of about ten minutes, five or six successive times : then came a pause. It was near dinner-time, and I began to feel hungry. There was a rap at my bedroom door. Was it the footman with hot water for dressing ? No ; it was the butler, a grave-looking personage, and at that moment graver than ever. Without even casting his eyes upon me, he went straight to my wardrobe, and taking out all my clothes, placed them on the bed, drew out my portmanteau and bag, and quietly commenced packing up my things.

Annoyed at my presence being entirely ignored, I loudly demanded what the man meant. I obtained no other answer than that it was "Sir Hugh's pleasure." It was useless to make a disturbance ; so I succumbed. By-and-by a light

dogcart, driven by the under groom, came round to the front door. It was “Sir Hugh’s pleasure” that I should leave the house without seeing any of the family. I obeyed with indignant promptitude, and as I sprang into the dogcart heard a voice—I need not say whose—exclaim in accents of mock politeness, “*Bon voyage, monsieur, bon voyage!*”

One little circumstance had somewhat comforted me. I caught a glimpse, as I passed the schoolroom, of Ada sitting on a low stool, with her head on Lady Littlecot’s lap; the latter was soothing and caressing her.

I slept at an inn at Stoke-on-Avon that night, and reached the school next day. Dr. Drax had been already enlightened by a letter from Sir Hugh on the subject of my sudden expulsion from Severn Banks. He received me ungraciously enough: did not offer me a comfortable arm-chair, as on the previous occasion; did not give his blessing. I had subsided in his estimation to my former commonplace level.

CHAPTER III.

GROSVENOR SQUARE.

WE talk of half a dozen years making more difference in the inner life of the young, than of the middle-aged. For myself I have scarcely found this so. From sixteen to sixty I have known changes of thought and feeling; but not more so in my earlier years than now. The vicissitudes of youth strike their roots more deeply into the memory than those of later life. Thus, though my inclinations, wishes, hopes, have undergone during middle age far greater change than at any other period of my life, I am less conscious of change now, than when I compared myself on leaving college, with what I was before I went thither.

Had I forgotten Ada Littlecot? By no means. During the remainder of my brief stay at school,

I cherished my recollection of her in solitary musings and waking dreams. My imagination invested her with ideal interest, and at leisure moments was ever busy in weaving a romantic tale, in which she and myself were the principal characters.

But on removing from school to college, leisure moments became more scarce. Life grew more earnest. My career as a man was beginning. Prizes and honours were to be striven for in tough competition with my equals. Ada was not forgotten ; but she was fast fading into a thing of the past, a pleasing reminiscence, like that of a poem, picture, or tune we once loved, but do not expect to derive any enjoyment from again.

For to Severn Banks I received no second invitation. Sir Hugh sent no message of inquiry after me, no faintest token of forgiveness, no expression of formal goodwill. His solicitors, Quickset and Harp, paid me my allowance and managed my affairs till I came of age. Then even that slight link between myself and the Littlecots was severed. It seemed unlikely we should ever meet again.

Great, therefore, was my surprise, soon after I had left college, having acquitted myself there with some distinction, to receive a letter in Sir Hugh's own handwriting, inviting me to spend a couple of weeks at his house in town. The invitation was stiff and ceremonious ; but it was clear and decisive. What made the circumstance more strange was, that Lady Littlecot—the gentle, kind-hearted Lady Littlecot—had recently died, after a lingering illness of some months, and the family were still in deep mourning. The letter of invitation was written on paper with the broadest of black edges.

It must be confessed, that I did not anticipate much enjoyment from the visit. Even the prospect of renewing my acquaintance with Ada scarcely reconciled me to the ordeal of meeting Sir Hugh face to face daily, making myself agreeable by consulting his wishes and respecting his prejudices, and this, not in a country house where there is plenty of elbow-room, but at No. 90, Grosvenor Square, where it would be difficult to escape close contact with him, morning, noon, and night. However, it was clearly incumbent on me to go thither

at once, and I did so, though with rather a heavy heart.

Sir Hugh received me in his private room ; it was scarcely a library, for he brought few books with him from Severn Banks ; but it was a spacious, comfortable apartment. A glance round it showed me that his daughter sometimes frequented it. There was her work-table and other indications of her occasional presence. Sir Hugh received me with a face almost as dark and menacing as when I last had the pleasure of seeing him through the glass door at Severn Banks. This was not encouraging. But to do him justice, the cloud passed away in a second or two, and the tone of voice in which he addressed me was less austere than in old times.

Perhaps the loss of his amiable wife had softened his temper ; perhaps he was conscious of having acted towards me with very unnecessary severity. Ada was sent for, and I awaited her arrival with much interest. The instant she entered the room, and recognized who I was, the colour rushed to her cheeks, her eyes were veiled in tears, and the little hand she placed in mine trembled perceptibly.

To tell the undisguised truth, I was rather disconcerted by this strong manifestation of feeling. Ashamed not to feel equally moved myself, and not unreasonably alarmed lest Sir Hugh should take offence at his daughter's emotion, I greeted her in an awkward, embarrassed manner, and in my anxiety to converse, had the excellent tact to ask after her horse, Juliette, a topic that increased our mutual confusion !

Meantime, Sir Hugh, statuelike, surveyed the scene without exhibiting either displeasure or approval.

Ada was of course altered. The sweet little fairy-like creature of fourteen had become a woman, graceful and comely, full of gentleness, but pensive almost to sadness, except under the influence of some agreeable excitement. After a pause, oppressively awkward, we all sat down ; I took up a book that lay on Ada's table, thinking it might suggest a topic of conversation. It was a volume of sermons, and I was again brought to a standstill. Ada, now however more composed, began to ask questions about Oxford, and by degrees, we struggled into a quiet vein of conversation, Sir Hugh joining. Visitors called, and

interrupted us, much to my secret satisfaction. I escaped to my room. One satisfactory change had taken place in Sir Hugh's household: the French valet, Alphonse, had disappeared: the cause of this it will be necessary to explain presently.

Though Lady Littlecot had not been dead three months, Sir Hugh kept a good deal of company. He had always taken great interest in politics, and was intimate with most leading men of Tory politics, and with others, not ostensibly leading men, who moved the springs of party behind the scenes. Sir Hugh, in early life, had been in parliament, and many thought he would have risen to eminence, had it not been for his impracticable temper. As it was, he broke with his party, and abstained from mixing in political affairs for many years.

The reform question roused him into activity once more. To save his country from destruction, or to speak the exact truth, to preserve the power of the aristocracy, Sir Hugh came forth from his lair at Severn Banks, like a giant refreshed. He threw all his energies into the contest, and served his party well. But the wave of liberalism was

advancing with irresistible force, and for the time swept all before it. The Tories, routed and discomfited, had at first succumbed in silent despair. They were now, however, beginning to take courage ; and emboldened by the blunders of their antagonists secretly gathered their forces for another effort.

Sir Hugh engaged in this scheme with austere enthusiasm. His reserved nature revelled in plots and counterplots ; his hatred for liberalism stimulated his ingenuity, and roused him once more to youthful activity. At his house, then, men met to plan measures of attack or defence ; whilst a rapid interchange of notes and messages went on between Sir Hugh and the Opposition leaders, from day to day, during any debate of importance. He was often seen in the House of Commons, seated in the Speaker's Gallery, bending his head downwards in motionless attention to what was passing ; much like a Gothic corbel of stern aspect supporting a projecting cornice.

Although the society at Sir Hugh's house was therefore to a great extent political, I was struck with the large infusion of the purely fashionable element. At that time, I concluded that the

object was to mask and veil the more serious operations of party intrigue. Otherwise it would have appeared inexplicable.

Sir Hugh was not a social man; he disliked gaiety; his daughter Ada disliked it still more—especially at this moment when the wound inflicted by the loss of her beloved mother was fresh and bleeding. The bustle, excitement, and publicity of frequent entertainments were to Sir Hugh a worry and an annoyance. But to Ada they were torture.

I was impressed by the admirable patience and rare sweetness of temper with which Ada performed her part as mistress of the house, under these trying circumstances.

Quietly, but assiduously, I lent her all the assistance in my power. When I perceived her entangled in conversation with persons I knew to be distasteful to her, I would come to her aid, and either draw them away, on one pretence or another, or bear the brunt of their frivolous, fatiguing chat by talking with them myself. Often would Ada's soft blue eyes beam upon me gratefully, as in this way, from time to time, at morning concerts or at evening entertainments, I interposed on her behalf.

There were a good many people from Meadshire at the house :—Sir Claude Cockayne, a man of fashion, struggling with the encroachments of wrinkles and grey hairs, but tall, well-built, stately ; Hartley of Mount Maurice, young, and rather handsome, supposed to be rich, but of restless, unsettled disposition. He had never spent a season in town before, and I set him down as a political *protégé* of Sir Hugh's. He had been notorious at college as an advanced Liberal, and seeing him so much at Grosvenor Square, I concluded he was undergoing the process of conversion at the hands of Sir Hugh Littlecot. Then there was Colonel Trump, a country squire of a good type, warm-hearted, honest, and a capital man of business. He had succeeded to the post of chairman of quarter sessions on Sir Hugh's resignation. My old friend, Captain, now Major Blandy, came a good deal to the house.

Major Blandy reminds me of Clara Lamplugh. Sooth to say, Clara had not treated him well. After leading the good-natured hussar in her train for two or three seasons, she commenced a desperate flirtation with a German prince, whose name I have forgotten how to spell. Clara was

occasionally seen at Sir Hugh's in company with her mother, a stout lady with bright eyes and a strongly-pronounced aquiline nose. The likeness between mother and daughter was sufficiently apparent to induce one to moralize on the evanescent character of female beauty. As Mrs. Lamplugh was now, so would Clara be a very few seasons hence! Mrs. Lamplugh was one of the few ladies patronized by Sir Hugh. They were often seen in close converse. Sir Hugh leaning his head a little forward, with eyes fixed on the ground straight before him, and only speaking at long intervals, and then not more than half-a-dozen words ; Mrs. Lamplugh talking rapidly and eagerly, in a voice not audible to any one but the gaunt old baronet. Understanding she had the *entrée* to the great Whig houses, I concluded that their conversation chiefly ran upon the plans and prospects of the Whig party.

Of the persons who most troubled Ada, I think Sir Claude Cockayne and Colonel Praunce were especially conspicuous. Colonel Praunce was a heavy man with plenty of money. He wore a huge beard to give himself an air of importance. He followed Ada about with stolid, unreasoning

affection, that reminded one of Una and the Lion. As for Sir Claude, there was a Lady Cockayne down in Meadshire; but he was one of that obnoxious class of married men who haunt young ladies' society for no particular object, and affect to be greatly in request amongst them.

As for Hartley of Mount Maurice, he went with the stream, and paid almost as much attention to Miss Littlecot as the others. But his chief attraction at the house, Sir Hugh said, was the political society. He would come forward for the county some day.

One night, however, Hartley appeared to haunt Miss Littlecot with unusual pertinacity. He followed her from room to room. Sir Hugh told me, in a casual way, that he was talking politics. I thought this a curious subject of conversation to force upon a young lady, but there is no accounting for idiosyncracies, and political converts are zealous. It seemed clear, that, whether Sir Hugh was correct or not, his daughter was wearied and distressed. With Clara Lamplugh's assistance, I came successfully to the rescue. Hartley was seated by Ada, *tête-à-tête*, on a remote sofa. We inveigled Sir Claude Cockayne into the belief that

Ada had several times looked anxiously towards the corner of the room where he was holding forth to three young ladies on the virtues of Macassar oil. Sir Claude crossed the room in his best manner, and subsided into the sofa by Ada's side, interrupting Hartley by a remark upon the weather, in a highly confidential whisper, and with a look of the deepest devotion. Colonel Praunce, seated on a far-off ottoman, with his beard every now and then descending abruptly on his waist-coat, under the potent influence of after-dinner somnolence, was roused to exertion by a whisper from Clara, and followed Sir Claude with heavy strides ; but, not knowing exactly what to say, stood opposite Ada in an attitude of hopeless embarrassment. Hartley was much more put out than we had anticipated. He flushed up to the eyes, and, rising hastily, disappeared through the nearest door at the moment that I also had joined the party, and was offering my arm to Ada to escort her into the tea-room.

Ada, however, seemed much relieved, and we had some quiet talk together, unmolested by any of her tormentors.

Severn Banks was of course one of her favour-

ite topics. She never even remotely alluded to our juvenile adventures in past times, but was fond of describing the improvements in the gardens and grounds, and more particularly her employments and amusements when residing there. As for her amusements, they appeared to be what most young ladies regard as highly proper but rather trying duties, visiting the sick, taking a class at the village-school, making clothes for the poor, &c. Her trying duties were to entertain Sir Hugh's guests, or share the gay festivities given by Sir Hugh's friends and neighbours.

I was puzzled by tastes and predilections quite outside the sphere of my experience. Yet the novelty of the thing amused me, and I encouraged her to talk freely. It seemed to do her good. Her eyes brightened, her cheeks and lips recovered their colour, as she told me the history of her daily life in Meadshire. From any other person details of school-teaching and cottage-visiting, stories of naughty children and good children, rheumatic paupers and repentant poachers, old women who could read their bibles without spectacles at eighty, a child of three who had composed a

hymn equal to any of Dr. Watts's, a consumptive groom who intended to take to field preaching if he ever recovered, would have been tedious enough. But Ada looked so sweet, and good, and gentle, and her countenance so lighted up with the loveliness of her early girlhood, that I listened in calm contentment.

Unfortunately a little remark escaped me, scarcely consistent with deep religious convictions. I hinted that if after all there was no such thing as another world, all her work would be wasted. It was a silly observation, and I regretted having made it when I noticed its effect on Ada. Her colour changed, and carried away by her feelings she put her hand upon my arm, and fixing her blue eyes upon me, exclaimed, in a voice of sorrow and alarm: "Another world? Oh, Mr. Chauncey! surely you have no doubt of it?"

I was a little confused, but answered in a cheerful voice, that there were many remarkable symptoms of the existence of a future state: that it was safer to believe in it, &c.

She was not satisfied, and pressed me with other questions. I was glad to be interrupted by Clara

Lamplugh who was going to sing, and wanted Ada to accompany her on the piano.

Nevertheless Ada would not part from me until I had promised to look over a row of theological books on a certain shelf in Sir Hugh's library. She would put marks in those most appropriate to my case. I did not see Hartley again that night, but at breakfast we met as usual. He was a little stiff at first, but his nature was rather passionate than sullen, and he soon yielded to a few good-tempered courtesies I took care to show him.

I did not forget my promise to Ada, and as soon as Sir Hugh was clear out of the house, bound as usual for White's Club, I stepped into the library. Truth compels me to own I did not dive deeply into the theological works ; some lighter publication caught my eye, and engaged my attention, but I was interrupted by a light footstep, and looking up beheld Ada Littlecot. I blushed to be detected examining an illustrated French edition of *Don Quixote*, instead of *Law's Serious Call* ; but Ada was very good : she gently directed me to the shelf where the theological works stretched their long array, and

taking down one or two of them, showed the passages she wished me to study.

I was a patient and docile student, she was an earnest and industrious teacher—time passed—a cabriolet drove up to the door: it was Hartley's, and we did not take much notice of the persons who alighted. But the next moment we heard Sir Hugh's deep-toned voice and measured foot-step in the passage. I prepared to withdraw, not caring to encounter the baronet, but was startled by Ada's expression of countenance; she was evidently in great distress. Was she afraid of Sir Hugh finding us together alone? I could draw no other conclusion from her manifest emotion. There was a door leading from the library into a breakfast-room beyond. By making my retreat through it, I should avoid Sir Hugh, whose hand was already on the other door opening into the passage. Without a word I hastened to it, and as I thought, escaped.

But before I could enter the breakfast-room, another door had to be opened, and my confusion may be imagined, when, on turning the handle I found this door was bolted on the other side. I was imprisoned between two doors, the one

locked, the other opening into the library. In the latter I now heard Sir Hugh's voice austere remonstrating, for some reason unknown, with his daughter. What he was saying I did not hear—did not wish to hear—my only anxiety was to make my escape. I dreaded lest Sir Hugh should take it into his head to open the door, and find me cooped up in a confined space, the very picture of a detected spy. The voice continued stern and sonorous. Carefully, but with all my strength, I pressed against the door into the breakfast-room, in the vague hope of the bolt or lock giving way.

A friendly hand suddenly opened it, and I stumbled forwards into the breakfast-room, with more precipitation than was quite agreeable.

“Mr. Herbert Chauncey!” exclaimed a voice, in which merriment and mischief were blended; and before me appeared the pleasant countenance of Clara Lamplugh. I was rather confused, and, as Clara afterwards told me, pale as a ghost.

“Don't be cast down!” she continued: “Sir Hugh is sure to come round in the end. Never mind his scolding. The storm will blow over. And as for Ada, she is true as the dial to the

sun. Come rain or shine, her heart will never change."

I stopped her as soon as I could. But the idea was fixed in her mind. I had been soliciting Ada's hand; Sir Hugh had scouted my proposal, and driven me out of the room, baffled and humiliated.

Clara knew all about it. Did I think she had no eyes? Her mother had told her lots of things. I had better confess the truth. I might find her useful. Half in jest, half from curiosity, I humoured her, and no longer contradicted her assertions or parried her insinuations.

Great reason have I to remember that unpremeditated interview with Miss Clara Lamplugh.

"You think," I said, "Sir Hugh hates me; but if so, why does he ask me to his house?"

"I can tell you all about it if I choose; but I don't intend. It would make you more conceited than ever."

"Nonsense; I am the most humble-minded of men. A little encouragement is wholesome for me."

She laughed, and for a while amused herself with teasing me. At length I extracted from

her, in piecemeal fashion, what her mother had told her.

"Mind, you are not to tell Ada; if you do, I will entertain all my friends with a minute and particular description of the absurd appearance you presented, when you rushed headlong into the room just now. Now promise—promise as you value my good-will, and dread the ridicule of Grosvenor Square. Well, to proceed, I must tell you Sir Hugh was anything but a kind husband to Lady Littlecot. You nod your head sagaciously, but I don't think you understand much about it. She was very unhappy. This went on for years; but I must not make my story too long; suffice to say, that at last Lady Littlecot fell ill. It was a lingering illness. Sir Hugh was touched by her patience under suffering, and sweet, forgiving temper towards himself. He was ready to do whatever his poor dying wife asked him, and solemnly bound himself to carry out a good many instructions she gave him about the poor of the village, and the servants, but more especially about his only child Ada. As soon as the poor thing was in her grave, I think Sir Hugh was sore vexed at having hampered

himself with these promises, for his temper became as bad as ever. But I believe he has hitherto kept his word."

"Well," I interrupted, "and how does this long story concern me?"

"I am going to tell you, sir. One thing Sir Hugh promised was this; to forgive a certain Mr. Herbert Chauncey his many and glaring offences, take him once more into favour, put up with his innumerable disagreeable qualities, and help him on in life to the best of his power."

She fled from the room, laughing at my look of perplexity, and it was a day or two before I had an opportunity of resuming the conversation; but Clara either would not, or could not, tell me much more. All I could elicit was this. I might rely upon Ada's fidelity; she would never give me up; Sir Hugh would not persist in thwarting the wishes of his only child. I must persevere, and ultimately Ada would be mine.

It is rather a startling circumstance, to wake up one fine morning, and find that, without the least intimation on your part, without having given authority, or received warning, you are as

good as engaged to a young lady, whom the day before you only regarded as a pleasant acquaintance.

As for my boyish love affair with Ada, that was nothing. The busy life of manhood had brushed it from my memory. We two were changed. Love to be real must be built up anew, just as if we had never met before.

These thoughts occurred to me, and made me very serious. But one thing could not be denied ; Ada was a sweet and lovely girl ; I liked her more and more : in fact, I loved her almost as a sister—she was goodness itself.

Granted, that the sentence to marry her was somewhat sudden and unexpected, it was one to which I ought very speedily to feel reconciled.

A few days afterwards, Hartley took his departure. We shook hands at parting, and Hartley said, in a low voice, for it was in the entrance-hall, and servants stood near,—

“ Well, Chauncey, I wish you joy.”

“ Thanks ; but I really do not know for what.”

Hartley made no further remark ; but, wrapping his overcoat round him, passed into the street, and sprang into his carriage. As the light fell

on his face, I noticed that he looked anxious and unhappy.

At dinner that day, Sir Claud Cockayne, Colonel Trump, and other Meadshire friends, with myself, were at Ada's end of the table. Sir Hugh was encircled by political notabilities. There was Beckington, a foremost man on the Opposition benches, and one or two other M.P.'s. There was Lord Annandale, a Whig, but as a near relation of Sir Hugh, sometimes invited to Grosvenor Square. There were a couple of well-known writers for the Tory press. Notwithstanding Annandale's Whiggism, the conversation at that end of the table was most amicable. As is not unusual, the Whig lord laughed at the peccadilloes of the Whigs, and the Tory M.P. exposed the blunders of the Tories. Lady Annandale and Mrs. Trump, on either side of Sir Hugh, engaged his attention, or otherwise he might not have permitted such levity on the sacred subject of politics.

At our end, the theme of conversation was Hartley of Mount Maurice.

"I am glad he is gone," said Blandy, in a confidential whisper, audible to half the table;

"the man was too much in earnest. I hate earnest people; they are bores."

"Earnest about what?"

"Oh! politics. Don't you know he professes to be a convert from Whiggery? As if a Whig could ever be thoroughly converted! 'Tis like dying red hair black. The result is only a dirty purple—neither one thing nor the other."

Colonel Praunce, with a guilty look, mechanically placed his hand upon his beard. Clara Lamplugh good-naturedly took up the cudgels for Hartley.

"I like Mr. Hartley. In fact, if there were not so many Meadshire people in the room, I should say he was the cleverest and handsomest man in the county."

There was a general outburst of expostulation. Blandy became rather warm, and declared his private opinion that Hartley was insane, and his valet a keeper in disguise. Sir Claude Cockayne said he had too much colour to be handsome. A ruddy cheek turned Sir Claude's stomach. It was utterly plebeian and butcherlike.

But at this point of the discussion, Sir Hugh, who had begun to catch the subject of our dis-

course, interposed in a voice audible all down the table like a far-off muttering peal of thunder :—

“ Mr. Hartley is a man of high character, and my very good friend. Pray be merciful, gentlemen, for my sake, if not for his.”

Ada blushed crimson. Sir Claude exclaimed, in a loud voice, aside,—

“ How like your worthy father, to take the part of the absent ! ”

“ Very true, Sir Hugh,” cried Colonel Trump, who was a keen foxhunter ; “ very true. Hartley’s a thorough gentleman, and no mistake ! He rides ‘ straight.’ ”

After dinner Sir Hugh took me aside, and introduced me to Lord Annandale. I was, of course, much honoured. We had a good deal of conversation. Partly out of regard for Sir Hugh, and partly from a clear appreciation of my many good qualities—so Annandale expressed himself—he made me an offer of a subordinate diplomatic appointment at Turin, in itself insignificant and unremunerative, but valuable as a stepping-stone to something better.

I asked a day or two to consider. Annandale gave me until to-morrow morning, at twelve o’clock.

There was one difficulty; I had little acquaintance with modern languages. Even of French I only possessed the merest smattering.

"Well," rejoined Annandale, "in the good old times, that would have been wholly immaterial. But, in these days of pedantry and pedagogism, you may as well take a run over to Paris, board in a French family for a fortnight, and brush up your French. It will keep you more independent of your clerk, and prevent his making fun of you among the natives."

I pondered much over Lord Annandale's offer, and formed my own conclusion thereon. It seemed in truth an ingenious device of Sir Hugh's, for pushing me forward in life, agreeably to his promise to Lady Littlecot; and, at the same time, getting me out of the country, and out of Ada's sight, in accordance with his own secret inclination.

The device was well-planned, and ought to have succeeded. But human arrangements often break down. I accepted Annandale's offer, and in due time went abroad to my diplomatic post. But I went thither the accepted suitor of Ada Littlecot. The reader will not be much surprised at the an-

nouncement. Our marriage was to take place in a year, or a year and a half, or it might be even later. I must first secure some definite standing in the diplomatic service ; on my marriage I might, and should, abandon it for ever. The husband of Ada Littlecot would inherit—not Severn Banks, for that went to Lord Annandale—but property in more than one county, and a large sum in the funds.

Clara Lamplugh was right. Sir Hugh did not forbid the marriage ; his only child must have her way ; the only condition was that just named.

My good, sweet, lovely Ada leaned her head upon my shoulder, and with tears of joy confessed she was, for the first time in her life, perfectly happy ; so happy that she must pray for help from above, lest the happiness draw her affections from heavenly things.

CHAPTER IV.

A TURN OF THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE.

IN due course, I repaired to Turin, presented myself to the ambassador, and entered on my duties. But many months had not elapsed, before I was summoned back to England. The cause I am now about to relate.

My apartment looked into the street. I was seated at the window, watching the stream of carriages, passing and repassing, in the gray twilight of a cool Italian evening—the only time when exercise is enjoyable during the heat of summer even so far north as Turin ; when I noticed a fiacre approaching, at a rapid pace, along the street leading from the *Messageries*. It stopped in front of the house and some person sprang out, wrapped in a heavy great-coat—a species of attire provincial Englishmen patronize, even in summer travelling.

The man, whoever he was, disappeared under the massive colonnade that flanks the principal streets in Turin. Presently, however, came a rap at my door. A gentleman from Meadshire wished to see me, on business of importance. He was announced as Mr. Malpus.

There entered a grey-haired old man, rather countrified in manner; but of grave and venerable aspect. If it had not been for a slightly nasal drawl in his voice, I should have been quite charmed with him; as it was, I received him with marked respect, and pressed him to be seated.

But Mr. Malpus would not advance more than a couple of paces into the room, and placing his respectable white hat, which I noticed had a wide band of crape round it, on the ground by his side, lifted his hands in the air, and exclaimed—

“Now, bless you, Mr. Herbert, if you are not the picture of your poor dear mother!”

I was glad to hear it, but anxious to know his business.

“Ah, Mr. Herbert, you can’t recollect me. No, sure; but I recollect you. Ay, that I do. And you be grown too, Mr. Herbert. Well, it’s a privilege for my old eyes to look on you once

again — a privilege I'm humbly thankful for." And he bowed his head, as if the thought quite overcame him. Presently I got him into a chair, and, after unbuttoning his great-coat, he produced letters of which he had been the bearer.

My cousin Jeffry was dead, and had left me the whole of his landed property, and most of his money in the funds. Malpus had been my cousin's steward for many years, and during his long illness and incapacity for business, much had been necessarily committed to his trust. He would be a useful man in many ways, and it was as well to be civil to him. But I could not quite forget that, until that particular moment, Mr. Malpus had never expressed any interest in my resemblance to my late mother, nor done me one single act of kindness, though opportunities had often occurred when I was at school in Meadshire.

I procured rooms for the venerable man, and made him comfortable after his journey; he, all the while, murmuring his deep sense of the condescending kindness shown him.

As soon as it was practicable, I started for England. The intelligence of my good fortune had at first almost stunned me. I could scarcely

believe I was really lifted from a state of social insignificance, to a position of wealth and influence. By degrees I began to measure and appreciate the great alteration in my circumstances, and to meditate upon schemes for the future.

Yet, one fact confronted me, and would not be dismissed. I should have been made far happier by this influx of good fortune a year ago. I was then free—entirely my own master—at liberty to go where I would, and do what I would. I was now engaged to be married. Not that I regretted this ; I was attached to Ada. Our occasional meetings, and frequent interchange of letters, had increased my regard for her, and deepened her affection for me. Still, a few months' freedom would have been pleasant. It seemed rather prosaic to settle down at five-and-twenty, into the steady married man, of the country-gentleman type.

I do not know that Ada was really happier for the news. I rather think it had been a secret comfort to her, to feel that her great expectations, in some faint degree, compensated for the lack of those manifold good qualities she was so kind as to attribute to me. My poverty was, in her

estimation, an agreeable set-off to my merits; and in some degree diminished the weight of the obligation entailed upon her by my affection. Now, our worldly circumstances were more equal. Good and religious as she was, I think she could not wholly repress a womanly feeling of regret and dissatisfaction.

I was not, however, long in London. My cousin died at Paris, and thither I was obliged to repair.

Sir Hugh was very gracious at parting. It could not be denied that matters had turned out better than he had expected. The owner of Glenarvon Court was no very unworthy aspirant to his daughter's hand. The match was not so very unequal. Her happiness would be promoted, and his honour and dignity secured. The austere baronet looked younger by ten years. A kind of wintry sunshine lighted up his countenance, and softened the wrinkles that seamed his brow.

After transacting business at Paris, I found it necessary to make a short stay at B——, a French seaport, on my way homewards. Captain Esher, my late cousin's executor, was vice-consul there, and many matters needed to be jointly discussed and decided by us.

On quitting Paris, a little incident occurred which it may be as well to notice. In the large *porte-cochère* of Meurice's hotel, whom should I stumble upon but Alphonse, Sir Hugh's former valet.

I have said that there was no love lost between us: but, after the lapse of so many years, there was not a spark of ill-feeling in my breast; on the contrary, I was inclined to be friendly. My late accession of fortune aided me, perhaps, in arriving at this amiable frame of mind. I was disposed to be friends with everybody: so, accosting him in a cheerful tone of voice, I asked how he did, who was his present master, and whether he was stopping long in Paris? At the same time, I tried to slip a guinea into his hand.

To my exceeding surprise, the man drew back his hand with an absurd assumption of indignant scorn, and replied, “Monsieur Herbert Chauncey, I remember you very well. You have been much my enemy; you did poison Miladi Littlecot's mind against me, you did poison Mademoiselle's mind; I have not forgotten these things.”

I bore with the man good-temperedly, denied his charges, remonstrated with him on his impertinent conduct, and again proffered the guinea.

“*Monsieur*, you tried to take away my bread ; that is nothing. You did wound my honour ; that is very much. I will not have neither your money nor your friendship !” He slapped his breast and indignantly strutted away. I did not attempt to stop him.

He was now confidential servant to Lord and Lady Annandale, and in receipt of a good salary. Even if I had strengthened Lady Littlecot’s dislike to him by making known my own, it was done without malice ; and the man’s present position was as good as it ever was, in a pecuniary point of view. He was clearly an ill-conditioned, worthless little fellow.

Arrived at B——, my servant was despatched to ascertain Captain Esher’s address, and, this being done, I sallied forth thither in the cool of the evening. During the day, business obliged Esher to be at his office, adjacent to the quay ; but the house in which he resided was in the upper town. I found it without much difficulty, close by the principal gate—a long low building, painted a dazzling white, with Venetian blinds of the brightest green. A couple of poplars threw a thin straggling shadow athwart the high-pitched

roof. It was necessary to descend a few steps to enter the narrow strip of garden, or, strictly speaking, courtyard, in front of it. As I did so, I perceived at the open window of a room on the ground floor, a fine-looking man, advanced in years, but still hale and hearty, seated in an arm-chair, with a large meerschaum pipe in his mouth, whence slowly issued occasional wreaths of fragrant tobacco-smoke.

My travelling cloak was thrown over my arm, and the captain at first took for granted I was some troublesome stranger come to discuss business, after business hours were over. He surveyed me with an eye of suspicion, removed his pipe from his mouth, and uttered a groan of mingled alarm and disapprobation. No sooner, however, had I introduced myself, than his manner changed. A joyous smile lit up his countenance, and, leaning out of the window, he seized both my hands in his, and shook them with such vigorous goodwill that I thought he would have lifted me off the ground, and over the window-sill. I preferred, however, the usual mode of entrance, and entering by the front door soon found myself seated by the captain's side in his private room. There

were few tokens of the captain's official duties or commercial engagements discernible. Business was banished from this quiet sanctum in the quaint old upper town of B—. On the chimney-piece, a model of a man-of-war, the rigging considerably dilapidated, and some loose tobacco sprinkled over the main deck, quite contrary to the rules of naval discipline; a portrait of a thin hard-featured naval officer with one arm, superfluous to name; two or three old-fashioned, rusty cutlasses, hanging against the wall, which the maid declined to clean, under pretence of being afraid of them; various horrid reptiles, carefully preserved in spirits; certain strange fruits done in wax, that engaged the attention, and disappointed the hopes of a constant succession of deluded flies; a bookcase, crammed with all manner of heterogeneous books, mostly in the flimsy covers of foreign editions:—such were the objects round the room that I first noticed on my entrance.

After a few commonplace remarks, I touched on the immediate occasion of my visit—the affairs of my late cousin Jeffry. But the captain interrupted me. He never discussed business after

dinner, it was wholly irregular. “A place for everything, and everything in its place,” that was his motto. And by way of illustration, the captain, having finished smoking, knocked the ashes of his pipe into the saucer of a coffee-cup on the table near him, and threw the pipe itself upon a heap of worsted work, left on the sofa by some lady inmate of the house.

“No: this is my only time for recreation,” he continued; “that’s to say, from four in the afternoon till eleven o’clock next morning. How can a respectable Christian do with less? It’s a trying life as it is, I can tell you, Mr. Chauncey; a trying life for a man who has served his king and country as I have. But I was always unlucky. Ill luck stuck to me always. Why, what d’ye think, Mr. Chauncey? Crusty and I—you know Crusty?—he’s Admiral Crusty now—Crusty and I were in that cutting-out affair at Guadaloupe; we were in the same boat, sir,—ay, his hand touched mine! And what d’ye think?—a round shot carried off his arm, and the lucky dog was posted in a month! As for me, of course I hadn’t a scratch, and here I am, a poor quill-driving non-descript, rotting in this vile old town, with no

more chance of hoisting an admiral's pennant than of wearing a bishop's apron ! That's my luck, Mr. Chauncey. But talking of dinner, I'll be bound you haven't dined yet ; now have you ? I thought not. My cook shall toss you up something in a trice." And the captain rang the bell vigorously.

After a considerable pause, a smart little French maid came to the door.

"Tell La Motte," exclaimed the captain, in French—"tell La Motte to prepare dinner for this gentleman instantly—a little soup, some fish, and an *entrée* or two. You will not be particular once in a way," he added, apologetically to me. "One thing I can promise you, whatever La Motte does, he does well."

The French maid meantime went through a series of rapid pantomimic gestures, consisting chiefly of elevating and depressing her black eyebrows, shaking her head from side to side, and lifting her hands in the air. Finally she disappeared, announcing her intention of speaking to madame. Esher was a widower, and I did not know who madame was, but she was evidently a person of some importance in the establishment. A sharp tap was heard at the door, and there en-

tered a neat little lady, in a rather stiff silk gown, a very clean cap, and open-worked black silk mittens on her hands.

“ Ha, my dear,” cried the captain, “ *à la bonne heure!* Here is my good friend, Mr. Chauncey, of Glenarvon Court, just arrived; and I want La Motte to exert his skill, and send up a bit of dinner forthwith. But I must introduce you—Mr. Chauncey, allow me to introduce you to my good sister, Miss Cossett.”

The captain, in a very gentlemanly, courteous way, introduced us. Miss Cossett curtseyed low, and begged me to be seated again. She was a half-sister only of the captain, and seemingly very unlike him in most points.

Instead of warmly responding to the captain’s hospitable allusions to La Motte, Miss Cossett made a sudden pounce upon the worsted-work on the sofa, and, with a little cry of dismay, drew forth the meerschaum pipe, and carefully hung it on its peculiar nail under the rusty cutlasses. Then she glanced significantly at the captain, hemmed once or twice, and tripped out of the room, he marching after her. There was a good deal of animated talk in the passage. Presently

the captain returned with a rather crestfallen countenance. He was exceedingly sorry, but through an unforeseen contingency La Motte was from home. There was, however, an excellent *café* round the corner. Would I allow the captain to escort me thither? I put myself in the captain's hands, and dinner was soon procured for me. The captain had dined, but consented, after a little pressing, to drink a bottle of Lafitte, for which, without any pressing, he allowed me to pay.

We took a walk round the old walls, and then back to the captain's house. At the door was a tumble-down, queer-looking little chaise, with a rough, strong-made pony harnessed to it. The driver was assisting a young lady to descend from the chaise.

“Ha!” exclaimed the captain, “here's Rosie! I must introduce you.” Then shouted to the driver, “Take care, La Motte, take care: that's not the way to help a lady out of a carriage!” And seizing “Rosie” by the arm, he lifted her out with an exertion of strength that wafted her some distance through the air, landing her on the door-step, half laughing, half crying, and altogether disconcerted.

It was not a favourable occasion for an introduction ; but raising a pair of dark-blue eyes for a moment to mine, she bowed hastily, and ran upstairs. It often happens that we look best when we imagine our appearance is least prepossessing. I thought I had rarely seen a more beautiful face ; or grace of manner so perfect, yet so unstudied.

Meanwhile, La Motte, the captain's *chef de cuisine*, whose duties seemed singularly multifarious, climbed up to the box of the little chaise, and drove off.

Tea had been prepared by Miss Cossett in the small drawing-room, opposite the captain's sanctum, and in a few minutes we were assembled round the table—Captain Esher, Rosamund his daughter, Miss Cossett, and myself.

“My dear,” exclaimed Esher, to his sister, “we can give Mr. Chauncey a bed, cannot we ?”

“Brother, brother !” cried Miss Cossett, “you always forget that the spare room is crammed full of lumber, not to mention cockroaches.”

Rosamund, in a clear, musical voice, with the very faintest touch of a foreign accent, now struck in,—

“And as it is only six feet square, and has no

bed in it, it is not a comfortable bedroom at the best!"

Miss Cossett pursed her pretty little mouth, and glanced at her niece, as if she thought the observation officious.

The captain, at first somewhat disconcerted, honestly burst out laughing; admitted that Rosie was right, but deserved to have her ear pinched for being so tremendously truthful, and promised to get me a lodging a few doors off. Meanwhile he despatched an individual, whom he styled the gardener, but who I found out afterwards was no other than the versatile La Motte, to fetch my servant and carry my luggage from the hotel in the lower town.

CHAPTER V.

THE BRINK OF THE PRECIPICE.

SOME temptations assail us sharply and suddenly. If they conquer, it is by a *coup de main*. Others envelop us by slow degrees, creep on from day to day, from point to point, until we cannot tell the exact moment when the will is vanquished, and the struggling conscience silenced. Yet, in truth, even here the real conflict is fought, the decisive advantage often gained, when the temptation first presents itself, a faint and shadowy form, and instead of at once cleaving it asunder and dispersing it, we sit still and gaze.

A day or two had not elapsed before something whispered to me, it were better not to prolong my stay at that old upper town of B—, nor daily visit that long low house, painted dazzling white, with shutters of brightest green,

and the shadows of the poplars flickering over the high-pitched roof.

I asked myself why? but took care not to repeat the question too searchingly, nor tarry long for a reply. Had I not business of importance to transact with Captain Esher, my late cousin's sole surviving executor? I had; and it must be owned, it was not entirely my fault that the business hung on hand. Captain Esher flatly refused to talk on business before eleven o'clock, A.M., and after four o'clock, P.M. This much impeded the progress of affairs, for even during the business hours I could by no means make sure that my business should have precedence of that of others. Perhaps, by firmness and decision, I might have brought matters to an issue. But the captain was so good-humouredly obstinate, so innocently wayward and shifty, so amusingly perverse, that he managed to have his own way a great deal too much. Then the weather was so fine, the drives and rides so agreeable, and the boating excursions so enjoyable; aunt Cossett so attentive and so winning, making me feel so entirely at home; that, altogether, a few days' sojourn was a pleasant change from the bustling, restless

life I had lately led. I did not, in summing up the causes why I found the time pass pleasantly, name Rosamund Esher. An engaged man ought to ignore the existence of all young women save one. I put her aside as a mere ornamental item of the household furniture. I would not admit to myself that she in any way contributed to the attractions that made my sojourn at Boulogne an inconvenience so easy to be endured.

One morning, however, I received a letter from Ada, gently remonstrating with me on my protracted absence, and short and hasty letters. It was requisite to answer it by return of post. The task of writing to Ada had never been irksome to me, often an amusement, often a source of consolation when troubled or careworn. But now I could not disguise from myself that the duty was strangely distasteful. It was a burden rather than a pleasure. The fact was undeniable, and at first gave me much uneasiness. Surely this must denote a positive decay of affection. Nevertheless, I struggled on, and persevering with my letter, the irksomeness gradually subsided—my heart warmed towards my sweet and gentle Ada. Words

and phrases of playful tenderness and steadfast devotion, flowed freely from my pen. I folded the letter with a cheerful smile, and walked to the post, on good terms with myself and everybody else.

That afternoon, Miss Cossett waylaid me in the passage as I was about to enter the captain's sanctum ; she wanted to have a little chat with me.

She being a kind little soul, and myself in an unusually good-tempered mood, I followed her into the drawing-room, and left the captain to smoke his pipe in solitude.

There was no one else in the drawing-room. Miss Cossett, rubbing her little mitten hands nervously together, began :—

“ Mr. Chauncey, I trust you will excuse my acting a mother's part, which is a thing I am of course not used to ; but brother Esher was never a practical man, and his poor wife, though as handsome a creature as you ever set eyes on, was a thorough Frenchwoman, not to say Papist ; but she's in her cold grave, so it don't particularly signify what she was, and, altogether, I feel in a highly responsible condition.”

Miss Cossett paused to take breath. I could not

conceive what was coming, but, in a good-humoured way, begged her to be quite open with me.

“ You are very good, Mr. Herbert, you are very good—Chauncey, I should say ; but Herbert’s the prettier name, and I trust no offence is given. Now, what I want to ask you, Mr. Herbert, if you will forgive the liberty, concerns my niece Rosie.” Colouring, though I scarce knew why, I bowed my head courteously. She continued :—

“ As a practical woman, I may say, the only practical woman of the family, I come to you, Mr. Herbert, for advice ; which I trust you will not refuse to give, seeing brother Esher’s mixed up so much in your affairs, and was a personal friend of your cousin Jeffry—as good a creature as ever breathed, but weak in his morals, decidedly weak in his morals—though I ought not to say it, for he left brother Esher one thousand pounds in a codicil. To be sure the money is all gone now, for every penny was owing for furniture, but that was providential, since if it hadn’t gone to pay for furniture, it might have been fooled away promiscuously.”

I gently recalled her to the point.

“ Well, Mr. Herbert, what I want to ask is

just this. Taking my niece's pleasing appearance, and rather sensitive, but singularly sweet temper into account, is it your opinion she is best suited for an organist or a daily governess?"

I was so much surprised, that I could not make any reply. The practical woman of the family continued, in a reflective tone of voice:—

"An organist's line of life seems the most favourable to piety. Piety must come naturally to an organist."

I expressed regret to learn that it was needful for Miss Esher to be either one or the other.

"Mr. Herbert, you being a man of the world, with a college education, quite at home in the four first rules of arithmetic, can readily comprehend the importance of augmenting the family income when it falls short of the family expenditure by at least a thousand francs annually, though what that is in pounds I cannot tell, without pen, ink, and paper."

I asked if Captain Esher was aware of the proposed plan.

"Captain Esher? Oh, dear no. Certainly not; a father is the last person to be consulted on such a trying subject. His feelings would disturb

his judgment; mine are under command, quite under command. I consider myself, Mr. Herbert, the most strong-minded woman on this side of the channel, barring a slight tendency to hysterics when the occasion calls for it."

At this juncture, Rosamund entered the room. Whether she overheard the last few words uttered by her aunt, or had any other cause to suspect the subject of our conversation, I know not; but it was plain by her countenance that she was a good deal disturbed.

There was an awkward silence. Miss Cossett—the strong-minded Miss Cossett—exhibited marked symptoms of nervous apprehension, and, *à propos* of nothing particular, remarked "that bluebottle flies were more ornamental than useful, especially on window-panes."

Rosamund, glancing first at her aunt, and then at me, exclaimed, indignantly, with brightened colour and kindling eyes:—

"Aunt, you have done what I begged you would not do. You have been discussing my father's affairs and mine. Oh, I am so sorry—so ashamed!"

The young girl sat down near a table at the

further end of the room, and buried her face in her hands.

Miss Cossett, in whimpering, apologetic accents rejoined :—

“ Now, Rosie, Rosie, why can’t you trust your poor old aunt? Why mayn’t I act a mother’s part, and take counsel with a friend of the family, when the family income falls short of the family expenditure, and I dream every night of creditors and dungeons. Be practical, Rosie—be practical for once. Mr. Herbert’s very kind—very amiable, and will give you introductions to genteel families.”

Rosamund lifted her face from her hands, and, with a decision of tone that made her aunt give a little jump in her chair, exclaimed !—

“ My mother would have rather died than take such a liberty. It is very wrong, very indelicate, very wicked!” She checked herself, and once more hid her face in her hands.

Tears fell through her long slender fingers on the table before her. Family disputes are always unpleasant. Rising from my chair, I said a few words expressive of the interest I already felt in all that concerned Captain Esher and his

daughter, and of my willingness to be of service to them ; then quietly, but hastily, made my retreat —leaving Rosamund still in the same attitude, and Miss Cossett on the brink of an hysterical explosion. I dined that day at the *table-d'hôte* of an hotel in the lower town, but looked in at Captain Esher's in the course of the evening. Rosamund did not appear ; she was gone to visit a friend, who boarded at a convent near the old town ; she would not return till next day.

It was the first evening Rosamund had been absent. Esher, however, was in very good spirits ; Miss Cossett had recovered her equanimity ; a couple of friends dropped in ; they were fresh from Paris, and entertained us with rumours of wars and insurrections. Why did a feeling of inexpressible dreariness weigh down my heart, making me restless, distracted, silent ? Was it because of Rosamund's absence ?

I was vexed with myself for asking the question. I chided my morbidly-sensitive conscience ; it was unmanly—it was silly. I took my leave early, and wandered about the silent streets in a discontented mood. I had no particular notion whither I was going ; but, after half-an-hour or

so, I found myself standing outside the garden-wall of the convent where Rosamund was staying, with my eyes fixed upon the distant lights, glimmering faintly through the barred and narrow windows.

Starting back almost in alarm, I turned and hastened homewards. My conscience smote me sore ; I slept that night but little.

Next morning I rose early, and lying in wait for Esher, seized him as he was sallying forth, bound for the lower town. I good-humouredly, but firmly, insisted on his giving me a few hours all to myself ; it was my intention to sail for England that night. Esher was at first very rebellious, but at length yielded. He must go down to his office, but we could take our papers with us. He returned to fetch them. Miss Cossett's strong mind was nearly upset by the intelligence of my intended departure, and, as I left the house with Esher, I caught sight of her, in the act of wiping the tears from her eyes, at an upper window.

We were closeted all day, and, after all, with no immediate result. The business could not be finished for some days, and my departure must be postponed. Messrs. Quickset and Harp, acting

for some parties who owed my late cousin a considerable sum, secured by a mortgage, asked for further time. Knowing the firm well, I was inclined to grant the request, but my own solicitors must be consulted, and Esher's consent and signature in this, and other matters, would be requisite. It would be advisable to remain at B—— for a week longer at least. It would really have an absurd appearance if I left, merely to run back again a few days hence. I must stay where I was. This was a matter of honest regret with me, for I had summoned up all my energies, and was determined to go at once. But the delay could not be helped; and Esher shook me by the hand, with a laugh of friendly exultation.

That evening, entering Captain Esher's house through the door that stood open to admit the refreshing evening breeze, I passed into the drawing-room. Rosamund was there alone; seated on a low chair, her hands crossed on her lap, her eyes looking straight before her. She was deep in thought, and did not hear me enter.

For a moment I gazed unobserved upon her countenance. The features were not what would be called regular. To allude to an art then un-

dreamed of, the face was not suited for a photograph. The expression that played round the delicately-curved lip, the peculiar lustre of those violet-tinted eyes, would have been lost. The pencilled eyebrows would have seemed too strongly marked, and the nose, though to my fancy exquisitely chiselled, would have seemed too distinctly *retroussé* to be beautiful; the grace, the piquancy, the fire, could not be reproduced, save by the hand of an artist, skilful in touch, and keen in the appreciation of beauty of mind and form. But I ask pardon for detaining the reader.

When she saw me, the rich colour rushed into her cheeks, and, rising from her chair, she grasped my hand, with the quick, light pressure of modest confidence and frank good-will.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, in the accent now so familiar to my ear. "I feared you were going to leave us without saying farewell."

"Well, 'tis a painful word, and perhaps better omitted."

"Ah, those who care for each other truly, do not think so. But tell me: Are you come to say it now?"

"No; I remain at B—— a week longer."

She turned hastily, and went to the window. A voice from the outside, which I recognized as Esher's, exclaimed,—

"Why, my little Rosie, what's the matter? Who has been scolding you? What has troubled you? It's very trying when I come home from a hard day's work to find you thus."

"All right, darling papa; there's nothing the matter. How late you are! La Motte is in agony about the dinner. Oh, before you come in, please shut the jalousies; the sun is so strong!"

"Well, I will if you wish it, Rosie. But the sun will soon be set, and the room seems dark enough already—dark as a tomb, and I always had an aversion to tombs."

He closed the jalousies, and entered the house. Was Rosamund vexed at my staying? My heart and conscience told me plainly, No.

A thrill of irrepressible pleasure ran through my veins. My resolution melted away, my strength of will broke like a feeble reed; in an anguish of guilty joy I was about to clasp her to my heart, and declare my passion; but, at that instant, as I stepped towards her, pale, breath-

less, trembling, she, ignorant of what was passing through my mind, snatched up her book, and hastened from the room.

Round and round my weak and vainly-struggling heart the meshes of the net were woven. Vehemently, fiercely, I reproached myself in the solitude of my chamber that night. “Dead to all sense of honour, of duty, of humanity; do what you will, go where you will, you are guilty—cruelly, selfishly guilty; a culprit beyond pardon—unworthy pity. But you are yet free to hide your guilt, and save from misery one who, in the innocence of her young heart, loves you tenderly. You are free. Go hence, then, at once—go, and never return.”

I groaned in agony of mind. I flung myself on the floor; I tried to pray. Fool! how could I pray, when I desired not what I prayed for?

CHAPTER VI.

BROKEN VOWS.

A WEEK has elapsed. I am once more in London. I am free; I have broken loose from the spell that bound me. I have not declared my passion. My honour is yet safe; my good name unblemished; Ada Littlecot unharmed, unwronged.

When I presented myself at Sir Hugh's house, Ada received me with tearful, but affectionate chidings for my long absence. With what different thoughts and emotions did I now fold her in my arms! Yet I tried to comfort her, and talked, with feigned cheerfulness, of future plans. She was strangely disturbed, but seemed scarcely to know why. There was a beseeching tenderness in her eyes that wrung my heart.

What could I do? I was changed. I once believed I loved her: I had never loved until

now; I had only dreamed—foolishly dreamed—like a school-boy or a babbling poet. I had never loved until now, and now it was not Ada Littlecot whom I loved.

People laugh at love at first sight. Very likely they are right; all I know is that I went to B——, thinking only of business, of future plans, of future enjoyments. My path was smooth enough, I was prosperous and happy; wealth, prosperity, influence, were mine. My engagement with Ada was shortly to terminate in marriage. Meantime we associated as freely as is usual. Romance no doubt had vanished; but quiet satisfaction and calm hopefulness remained. My affection for Ada was true and brotherly: I felt grateful for the love she bore me.

Thus was I situated when I went to B——; there I met one who, if not at first sight, yet very rapidly, mastered my whole heart, subdued my spirit, reduced me to a state of trembling, helpless devotion.

I shall be told that this is an old story—quite a commonplace one. Here are two women, one of whom I love better than the other, and more shame for me. It is so; but it is the hinge on

which my life has turned. I saw Ada, as I have said; I saw her—ay, and I comforted her; I gently soothed her, and, not without a taint of hypocrisy, assured her of my tender interest and regard.

All the while my course lay plain before me. I had no intention of marrying Ada Littlecot; no, not the least. My purpose was simply to break the shock in store for her by slow degrees. Humanity demanded that the veil should not be suddenly torn from her eyes. I saw her two or three times. I called whenever I knew she was not at home; I left kind messages; I sent her some slight tokens of regard—a new book, a small article of jewellery, a bouquet of rare flowers. I eluded invitations on the score of business.

But the crisis came at last. One evening I had been a long ride into the country, for I eschewed all places of public resort, and, going into my sitting-room, threw myself on the sofa to rest. On the writing-table was a note. Fearing it was from Ada, I did not even read the address, but let it lie unopened. My servant shortly afterwards mentioned that the bearer of the note

would call again for an answer. It was useless to delay reading it. Rising, I languidly walked to the table, but the instant I recognized the hand-writing, I seized the note, with trembling hands, and tore it open. It was the quaint, little handwriting of Miss Cossett.

Rosamund was in town. She had accompanied her aunt, for the purpose of making inquiries respecting a situation, or employment, at home or abroad.

I sank back on the sofa, unnerved as a child, and for some minutes did not attempt to move. Then, recovering myself, I rang for my servant, and instantly drove to Duke Street, where Rosamund and her aunt were staying. Having alighted, I dismissed my cab, and paced up and down the street in the gathering twilight. It was too late to call, but for hours I lingered in the neighbourhood of the house, watching the windows, and imagining that every shadow flitting across the blinds was that of my dearest Rosamund.

I returned to rest that night in a feverish state, and did not sleep till the sun was up. My resolution was taken as soon as I awoke. I must see the woman whom I loved, not necessarily

to commit myself to any particular course, but to test the depth and reality of my feelings. If I loved her with my whole heart—so earnestly, so devotedly—it were madness, nay, it were sin, to unite myself to another.

I called in Duke Street once. I called a second time. I was there frequently. Meantime my mind was tossed to and fro by conflicting thoughts.

Misery must be in store for Ada Littlecot, whether I married her, or whether I parted from her for ever. It was sad, it was very sad; but it was inevitable.

Yet the anguish of separation—of shattered hopes—was transient. This, Ada would soon learn. The anguish of life-long union with a man whose heart is estranged, this is permanent, this is incurable, this is intolerable. I must rescue Ada from so deep a shame—so bitter a calamity.

It was a bright August morning. I had prepared a long letter to Ada, and trusted it would have a salutary effect. But it seemed requisite that I should see her father, Sir Hugh Littlecot.

I thought that a candid exposition of my sentiments would enlist him on my side, and induce him to co-operate with me in persuading Ada to

avert her thoughts from one whose heart could never more be hers.

I purposed placing my letter to Ada in Sir Hugh's hands, after explaining my situation to him in frank, truthful words, with ample expressions of sincere regret and kindly sympathy.

When, however, my carriage fairly stopped before Sir Hugh's residence, a change came over my spirit. My former boyish awe for Sir Hugh Littlecot seemed to revive. His countenance, his manner, his voice, came back to my recollection with disagreeable distinctness. But this was not all. By dint of reasoning and reflection, I had acquired something of that sober serenity of mind, accompanying the performance of a painful but necessary duty. The moment the time for action had arrived that serenity vanished. A suspicion seized my mind that my conduct was not merely dishonourable, but inhuman. Rebuking my want of nerve and vacillation of purpose, I hastily descended from the carriage, and entered the house. But it was with downcast looks and fluttering heart. The door of the library was flung open by the servant with obsequious alacrity. My engagement with Miss Littlecot was notorious,

and the man, as he placed a chair for me, said :—

“Miss Littlecot is upstairs, sir ; I will immediately let her know you are here.”

With precipitation I stopped him, stating that my business was with Sir Hugh, and that I must speak to him alone.

It was uncertain whether he was within. My secret prayer was that some excuse might offer for taking my departure without seeing him. The letter to Ada would suffice to explain and justify my intended course.

I found myself seated on the sofa where, side by side with Ada, I had been led into a warm avowal of feelings that I well knew were more than moderately shared by herself.

Presently, I heard her father’s footsteps approaching the door, with the unsteady haste of an old man.

Shaking me by the hand with a cordiality less measured than usual, and with a countenance that for him was cheerful, Sir Hugh, not noticing my embarrassment, exclaimed, in a voice of dignified affability :—

“So, Mr. Herbert Chauncey, you have once

more condescended to honour my poor mansion with your presence. We have missed you not a little, but I don't intend to scold you. You have had cares, duties, a press of business. Of course, of course. We men understand all this, but women are apt to be puzzled. However, Ada will be down directly, and you shall plead your own cause; no one can do it better. But——” added he, looking at me more narrowly, “my good friend, you are looking ill. Nay, nay, you must not take the matter seriously; it was an old man's pleasantry. Ada is easily pleased. You must take courage—you must pluck up spirit; she will not be very severe!”

The old man exhibited a liveliness of tone which, in my then state of mind, was really horrible. His words tortured me. With a violent effort I nerv'd myself for the work before me, and, in confused, faltering accents, began:—

“Sir Hugh, I have thought it more manly to meet you face to face, than to take shelter in a written communication; I want you to listen to me patiently, and not to judge me too harshly. I want you to hear all I have to say, for the sake of Miss Littlecot more than for my own.”

He was amused ; and, tapping me on the shoulder, made me seat myself by his side on the sofa, from which I had risen, and went on thus :—

“ Chauncey, my good fellow, we are taking matters far too much *au sérieux*. I am glad, very glad, to see you here, and some one else will be very glad also. You have been a little remiss, that is all—a little remiss, but with abundance of honest reasons, no doubt. There, there, say no more ; I am quite content—quite content.”

He attempted to take my hand in a patronizing, almost affectionate manner, but I withdrew it, saying :—

“ You will not be so long, I fear. Believe me, when I assure you, that I have something most serious and important to say to you. A great change has passed over my mind during the last few weeks. I almost regret it, whilst I yield to it. Not long ago, I meditated, with quiet joy, upon my approaching union with your daughter. That joy is at an end. I once loved and esteemed her. I esteem her still ; but I no longer love her as my conscience tells me I ought to love my companion for life.”

Sir Hugh was utterly bewildered. He gazed

at me with sudden anxiety and alarm, in the belief that my mind was unsettled. I proceeded, rousing myself to increased energy as I did so.

"It is needless to explain at length what has caused this revolution in my feelings. Suffice to say, that it is complete, that it cannot be remedied, that it must for all our sakes be obeyed. Do not think that Ada is to blame. No ; that good and gentle girl deserves a far worthier husband than I should ever prove. The fault, if fault there be, rests with me alone ; with my precipitation, my self-deception, my softness of heart. But the mischief is done. To marry your daughter now would entail upon both of us hopeless, irremediable misery ; our eternal happiness would be imperilled. I must snatch your child from the abyss over which she is suspended ; I must save her from a life of slow torture, and a future of despair. It is a duty I owe to a fellow-creature—a deed of gratitude to an affectionate girl—an act of mercy to a father who adores her."

"Mad, mad, mad !" muttered the old man to himself, his dark eyes fixed upon me in mingled astonishment and dismay. Truth to say, the excitement into which I had wrought myself, my

animated gestures, the strangeness of my avowal, might have led even an unconcerned spectator to a similar conclusion.

“No, not mad! Heaven forgive me, but I almost wish I were! Attend to me, Sir Hugh. Let me explain myself clearly. I am come to break off my engagement with Ada; I say it in great sorrow, but with no thought of swerving from my purpose. It is for her good, even more than for mine. The wicked may slander, fools may misinterpret; but I leave my case in the hands of the wise and good. I do not ask you to forgive me; I cannot hope for forgiveness yet. Nay, Sir Hugh, restrain yourself. Reflect on what I have urged. Think on the dreary horror of an unwilling union!—the anguish and the strife—the children, witnesses of their parents cold estrangement, or malignant enmity—think on the desecration of the altar!”

As Sir Hugh began to apprehend the drift of what I was hastily, and incoherently uttering, and realized the fact that I was thoroughly in earnest, a great change passed over his countenance.

His complexion darkened, his looks expressed

unutterable anger and contempt. Gathering himself up, he fixed his dark eyes sternly upon me.

Few will deny me the possession of very firm and unyielding courage. But I confess, that at this moment, in the presence of an infirm old man, glaring at me with fierce, but impotent wrath, my nerve was greatly shaken. I quailed beneath his glance, and felt anxious to withdraw from the house.

He broke out in a hoarse, hurried whisper—

“I understand sir, I understand. All is as clear as day, as clear as day. A very simple matter. It shall be arranged immediately; without the delay of a minute.”

Then starting to his feet, he added—

“But allow me to tell you, sir, what I think of you—what every man of honour will think of you. That you are the blackest scoundrel on the face of the earth.”

“Sir, sir,” I replied, also rising; “I can bear the unjust abuse of an old man, and that man a father. Reflect on all I have urged—do not condemn me rashly.”

“Peace: you have talked enough; I am sick of your hypocrisy. Let us come to the point.

You wish your engagement with my daughter broken off—certainly: it shall be done instantly; nay, it is done already. Fear not for my daughter. Were I a religious man, I would kneel down here, in this very room, and offer up thanks for her deliverance from so consummate a villain! Man, if I had dreamed that you were not only too thankful for the chance of marrying a creature so much your superior, I would have spurned you from my doorsteps like a dog! Her mother, on her death-bed, bade me be tender-hearted to the poor child, or I would have never tolerated you under my roof—never—never. But do not fear for my daughter; she shall thank you herself for setting her free. Wait an instant—be seated, sir; she shall thank you herself. An instant, sir, an instant."

He strode out of the apartment with an energy beyond his years. I was for the moment almost paralyzed. Shame, and confusion of face, over-powered me; yet I did not dare depart. I must carry out what I had begun. It would soon be over. I placed the letter for Ada on the table, and walked hastily up and down the room. Sir Hugh, however, was absent a considerable time.

It might have been a quarter of an hour, though it seemed far longer, and my impatience began to be unbearable, when I heard a stir in some distant apartment. Sir Hugh's voice was raised in violent remonstrance, and then came a sudden silence. Doors were opened and shut, a bell rang loudly, there were sounds of earnest whisperings, and a hurrying to and fro of feet.

Then, in a fierce, peremptory manner, Sir Hugh entered the room, his face pale as ashes, and his whole frame quivering with emotion. It would be difficult to describe the profound, vindictive hatred of the look he cast upon me.

He waved his hand towards the door, exclaiming,—

“Enough, sir, enough for the present. Leave us in peace; you will hear from us again.”

He paused, and placed his hand hastily on his heart; then seeing that I hesitated, he added, in a voice choking from emotion—

“Fellow, begone! I have done with you—begone! but take with you a father's hatred, and a father's curse!”

It is not in the nature of men of strong and vigorous character to endure, with perfect calm-

ness, reiterated expressions of loathing and contempt. Fortitude and resignation have their limits, and the outraged spirit will at length rise up in arms. This was partly the case with me, and as I passed through the door that Sir Hugh flung open for me, I gave vent to my feelings by a gesture of proud defiance. This transient emotion, however, instantly subsided. For, at the further end of the passage, a door was unwarily opened, through which issued stifled screams and lamentations—sounds of hysterical anguish and despair. Too well I understood the meaning of those sounds! I became faint, dizzy, sick. My servant, who was in waiting in the hall, supported me to the carriage. Even then I almost resolved to retrace my steps, throw myself at Ada's feet, implore for pardon, and undo the mischief I had caused. But it was otherwise ordained. The carriage bore me swiftly away. I breathed more freely, and felt my mental as well as bodily powers revive.

What I had done was done for the best. Time, the great healer of our griefs, would bring consolation to the enraged old man, as well as to the afflicted girl.

Ada Littlecot inherited none of her father's energy. He had in vain striven to rouse her indignation, and strengthen her pride. Uncontrollable anguish and amazement of spirit bowed her to the earth. She had neither the power nor will to address me, save in accents of outraged affection, and loving remonstrance. She loved me, and, wounded to the quick by the tidings her father brought to her, thought only of appealing to my honour and conscience, and compelling me to respond once more to her love. Her father was constrained to resign her, in a dangerous state of excitement, to female offices of kindness.

I have related this incident precisely as it occurred. If I erred, certainly my punishment was not slow to follow, and even my enemies will confess that it was wholly disproportioned to my guilt.

That day, partly from feelings of self-reproach, partly from a wish for quiet repose after so much excitement, I did not go near the house where Rosamund and her aunt were lodging.

I lay down on my bed as soon as I reached home, and immediately sank into a refreshing sleep, from which I did not wake for many hours.

After so many nights of restlessness, and after such a scene as I had passed through that morning, this was but natural.

Late in the evening, just as my mind was beginning to recover its wonted tone, a parcel was brought to me; it was directed in Miss Littlecot's handwriting. I anticipated its contents—a miniature of myself, a few books, some jewellery. A short note, couched in cold and formal terms, accompanied these melancholy relics of a bygone attachment. The handwriting was unsteady, but clear and distinct. Strange to say, it afforded me vague comfort to detect, or fancy that I detected, in the tone of the note, indications that the sorrow of this ill-used girl was passing into a feeling of calm displeasure and aversion. I flung everything into the fire, except the miniature.

CHAPTER VII.

GLENARVON COURT.

GLENARVON COURT, the country seat left me by my cousin Jeffry, was an ancient mansion, with pointed gables, broad windows with heavy mullions, ornamented chimney shafts of the Elizabethan period, and here and there a massive buttress, with bold mouldings, or deeply recessed arch, or solid parapet of an earlier date. The grounds round the house were extensive; the lawn sloped down to a trout stream that flowed through the valley, murmuring over its pebbly bed. Beyond the stream was a grove of stately elms, resonant with rooks. The village road was, in the winter time, visible through the leafless branches of the trees. Horse chesnuts, and other flowering trees of large growth, overshadowed the lawn, too gloomily

for my taste, but I feared to cut any of them down till I had seen their appearance in summer.

The general scenery of the neighbourhood was rich and varied. Hills, well wooded, of every variety of outline, closed us in on all sides, except towards the south-west. Here the country lay more level, but in the horizon rose the blue mountains of Wales, each undulation of which became familiar to us, as the face or handwriting of a friend well known.

It was here that I passed some of the happiest moments of my life. The scene was soon to change, but for the time all was light and gladness. Yet it might have seemed strange that this should be so, to those who looked only at the aspect of the world without. The winter had set in with uncommon severity; the brook, that usually gurgled noisily along its pebbly bed, was frozen into ghostly silence; the snow drifted so deep into the hollows of the roads, that intercourse between friends and neighbours was often wholly cut off; the birds lay dead from cold outside our windows; many flowers in our conservatory perished; shrubs in the garden, usually hardy,

were smitten, as if by a furnace-blast, to the ground.

Yet here, surrounded by a dreary desert of snow—the monotony of which was broken by gaunt, leafless trees, rising like skeletons, now solitary, now grouped confusedly together, over the white pathless waste—almost isolated from the world, living in an ancient mansion, with one large, lofty hall, and a succession of low, queer-shaped rooms, and rambling passages—lined with dark oak, haunted by strange echoes, and pervaded by the musty smell, peculiar to old houses, so grateful to the antiquarian—here, my young wife and myself were happy in each other's society, and almost without a care.

In Rosamund's deep heartfelt affection my recent sorrows faded away, as a stream lost in the waters of ocean; my wounded spirit was comforted and soothed. As for her, my dear and true-hearted companion, I withheld from her knowledge, with the most anxious care, the fact of my engagement with Miss Littlecot, my rupture with Sir Hugh, and the painful circumstances that followed.

Let the dead past bury its dead. Not mine

was the duty, nor mine the task, to involve in a common agony one so tenderly beloved, so sacredly cherished. We gave ourselves up to each other with sweet and hearty devotion ; certainly there was something touching in our love, it was of a kind that is rare enough now-a-days.

Nature out of doors, as I have said, seemed unpropitious, but we treated her austerity lightly. Screens, and matting, and heavy curtains, kept out the biting winter air ; fires blazed in the servants' rooms as cheerfully as in our own. Coal was of course cheap, and had it been otherwise, would not have been spared. Glenarvon Court was rendered as impervious to cold, as was possible in such a season.

There was an excellent library, thanks to the labours of my bookseller, who, confiscating most of the rubbish my poor cousin had bequeathed to me, substituted a judicious selection of ancient and modern literature. In the great hall was a fine piano ; in the gallery an organ, somewhat antiquated, but of magnificent tone. Here, whilst the flames leaped roaring up the huge chimney, Rosamund would often waken the organ with elastic touch, until its deep, passionate music reverberated

along the massive walls, and shook the faded pictures of my ancestors in their newly-gilded frames. At such times we suffered our servants to stand listening in the gallery. Many of them were Welsh, and could scarcely restrain an outburst of noisy applause. At times, especially when the weather was more piercingly cold than usual, we retired to the warmer and quieter precincts of the long, low library, whose well-lined walls afforded so many suggestions for silent reverie or pleasant converse. But the hall was our favourite resort.

I love to close my eyes and summon before my mind that dusky hall, those old pictures, that grotesque furniture; myself lying on the huge damask-covered sofa, reading aloud some piece of ancient or modern poetry; Rosamund on a low ottoman beside me, listening with breathless interest, her slender hand shading from the red glare of the fire those lustrous, violet-tinted eyes, and her countenance varying with the varying scenes and passions reflected on her impressionable soul.

I took pains, especially during the first months of our wedded life, to instruct her mind, and cultivate her tastes. Her education had been

desultory. She was at home in works of poetry or fiction ; she was astray in the sphere of useful knowledge. English history she knew chiefly through the medium of Shakspere, and, though familiar with Dante, would have been puzzled to point out the boundaries of Italy on a map of Europe. Disheartened by the matter of fact, she was guilty of a gracefully-concealed yawn at the very mention of logic or moral philosophy, whilst a sum in arithmetic made her head ache all the afternoon.

I briefly hint at the nature and disposition of my dearest wife, because it may afford a clue to much that is to follow. My hand traces the lineaments feebly and uncertainly, but I can do no more. A rush of many recollections carries me away.

The winter drew to an end at length. The snow vanished ; woods and shrubberies burst into leaf and blossom at the breath of the warm west wind.

In common with most of us I had ever hailed this season with delight ; now, however, my mind was strangely impervious to its exhilarating influence. It was not wholly superstition. We seemed, by

the breaking up of this rough and churlish winter, to be once more brought in contact with the world without. I shrank from that world, partly from the recollection of the recent painful passage in my life, partly from an almost morbid devotion to my wife.

When severed from the world Rosamund seemed wholly mine, from week's end to week's end—day by day. Soon we should have to part—for a brief space, no doubt—but still to part, from time to time. We should be exposed to public gaze; we should be drawn into society; there would be an end of our sweet, never-to-be-forgotten seclusion.

With Rosamund the case was wholly different. As for the past, she held it of little account. She knew nothing of my former engagement with Miss Littlecot. She would have started with vexation and astonishment, had any one ventured so much as to hint that I had loved at any time in my life any woman beside herself. She did not then dwell on the past; she rejoiced like a child in the glad change breaking forth in the outward world. Her lithe and active frame sympathized with the renewed freshness and bloom of nature.

Her cheek was warmed to a deeper crimson, her eyes sparkled with a more joyous lustre, and her musical voice, as she wandered singing through the shrubberies, woke up the nightingales from their morning slumber.

As the roads became more passable, and the days lengthened, visits from neighbours—some near, some more remote—became frequent. There was curiosity to see the young and handsome bride, and anxiety to know what sort of man might be the successor of old Jeffry Ferris.

Glenarvon, for some years past, had been deserted; and, that part of the county not being well off for neighbours, the gentry were anxious to show us civility.

Before I left town in the autumn, it was disagreeably evident that several of Sir Hugh Littlecot's immediate friends looked at me askance, and marked their disapproval of my conduct towards Miss Littlecot, by studied coldness of manner. Generally, however, our common acquaintances treated the matter lightly, or ignored it altogether. The world wisely concludes that there are two sides to every question, and, except when political, or religious, or fashionable jealousies stir up its

sympathy, and inflame its animosity, regards even grave scandals as a nine days' wonder, and nothing more ; content to believe that black is not so very black, nor white so very white.

Some of my friends seemed to think I had done an exceedingly humorous thing, and in congratulating me on my marriage, pressed my hand with more than common fervour, and favoured me with their arched and most expressive smiles. This was in London. Down in Meadshire, as well as over the Welsh border, the particulars of my engagement with Ada, and of my present marriage, were very imperfectly understood, and attracted little notice. Sir Hugh Littlecot's seat—Severn Banks—though in the same county, was beyond the range of ordinary visiting, and this was matter of gratification to me. It enabled me to guard the more effectually against meeting either Sir Hugh or Miss Littlecot in times to come. Of this there was no immediate prospect. There were rumours that Sir Hugh was going abroad, many said for Miss Littlecot's health, others for his own ; whilst some alleged that it had long been his intention to renew his acquaintance with the objects of interest and the

works of art of Italy, and that this was the whole explanation of the matter. One thing was certain—Sir Hugh was not expected at Severn Banks during the present summer. We, therefore, as in duty bound, but, so far as I was concerned, with a certain degree of reluctance, accepted the civilities offered, and began to mix in the society of Meadshire.

There was plenty of occupation for us at home. Rosamund threw herself into horticulture, and, with the aid of a skilful gardener, effected a wonderful transformation in the flower-garden. For myself, there were more serious labours. The estate of Glenarvon had been for some years managed by Mr. Malpus, the venerable-looking worthy—half farmer, half steward—who has been already introduced to the reader. I could not say that Malpus was decidedly dishonest; but he certainly took rather more care of “number one” than of his employer; and, notwithstanding his grey hair and serious expression of countenance, stooped to acts of meanness, which greatly annoyed me. He took presents from my tenants, and winked at petty infringements of the conditions on which I let my farms. This I discovered, soon after the

break up of winter enabled me to traverse my estate, and brought me in contact with my neighbours.

Accordingly, I determined to part with him, and fill his place with a competent and trustworthy agent. There was an unpleasant scene with old Malpus. He first cried like a child; then fell into a rage, and cursed and swore; finally, withdrew with an air of injured innocence, after calmly assuring me of his forgiveness. So far so good. My next care was to introduce my new agent, Mr. Maxwell, to the tenantry. He was received by one and all with looks of suspicion and dislike. Of course this might have been expected, for his appointment signified the commencement of a new and more strict regime. Yet by liberal covenants, a large outlay of capital in improvements, strict attention to repairs, and only a moderate and discriminating rise of the rents of my farms, I hoped to reassure my tenants, and render Maxwell popular.

It did not answer. The tenants were old-fashioned and obstinate—preferred the slovenly indulgence of the ignorant old Malpus, to the enlightened system introduced under the auspices

of a first-rate land-agent. There was always something amiss. Many of the tenants refused to attend the rent dinner, and rode off home, with an air of martyrdom, as soon as they had deposited their greasy bank-notes in Maxwell's hands, and taken their receipts. Others were perpetually making complaints, which on investigation proved utterly frivolous. Poor Maxwell was worried and annoyed in a variety of ways, and an evident conspiracy formed to disgust him with his situation, and drive him to throw it up. The tenants of other proprietors, and the small yeomen of the district, made common cause against him. Shunned at market and at agricultural gatherings, refused ordinary civilities by his neighbours, worried by the very lads of the village who robbed his hen-roosts, smashed his cucumber frames, and sent him ferocious letters, in a scrawling hand, with the alarming signature of "Swing," Maxwell passed his time very uncomfortably, and had it not been a matter of principle, I should have begged him to give way, and obtain a situation elsewhere.

It did not occur to me that any secret agency was at work in stimulating the rustic multitude

to combine against him. I did not know the character of the “natives,” and the set made against Maxwell, though absurdly vicious and violent, was capable of explanation. He was a man in advance of the common run of agents and farmers in Meadshire. He was introducing new customs—new ideas. He was likely to be dangerous, and must be put down.

The spring, however, had scarcely passed away, when deeper anxieties began to dawn upon me, and test the fortitude both of Rosamund and myself.

I think it was in May that I received the following letter from my old friend, Lord Folliott. He had recently returned from the Continent, and was staying, as was his wont for a portion of the year, with his grandfather, the Earl of Abermaur, who was Lord Lieutenant of the county.

“ DEAR HERBERT CHAUNCEY, “ Castle Abermaur.

“ How are you, and how is the fair Rosamund? Flourishing I hope, notwithstanding the bitter weather we have enjoyed all the winter. I have induced the earl—‘Abermaur’ I used to call him, only it sounds irreverent under his own roof—to wind up that matter of the Com-

mission of the Peace. Five minutes' conversation accomplished what five lucidly-expressed letters failed to do. To tell the truth, the humiliating suspicion seized me that he had never read them—but let that pass. The deed is done, and you have the honour and glory of being placed on the commission. Come to next quarter sessions at Stoke-upon-Avon, and take your oaths and pay your fees like a man. We want you; the times are busy; there will be much to talk about when you have finished your little farce in the paying and swearing line with the Clerk of the Peace. There are lots of men who want to know you; so mount your horse and come. I kiss your fair lady's hand, and am,

“ Yours ever,

“ FOLLIOTT.”

“ By the by, I find it is quite true Sir Hugh is off for Italy. Reasons various are given; but 'tis no business of ours. I trust the old gentleman will improve, like a pipe of Madeira, by change of air.”

Accordingly, when the day of quarter sessions arrived, I prepared to start for Stoke-upon-Avon.

It was a rough and stormy morning. Vast masses of cloud rushed continuously over the sky, from south to north. The Welsh mountains were no longer visible, and the outlines of the nearer hills loomed dimly through the thickening atmosphere. The gale shook the great elms and chesnuts to and fro, and the lawn was covered with young leaves and blossoms torn from the trees, eddying in almost ceaseless circles round and round. The birds skimmed the ground in search of shelter, and the lowing of frightened cattle was heard in the pauses of the blast. It was certainly an unpropitious day for a twenty miles' ride, and I sent out word that I should go in my carriage. No sooner, however, was it come round, than Rosamund, who had hitherto taken all my arrangements as a matter of course, sprang from her seat, and, to my great pain and surprise, flung her arms round my neck, and, with tears in her eyes, begged me not to leave home.

I remonstrated with her, but could elicit little, save scarcely articulate confessions of her weakness and folly, and appeals to my good nature not to be vexed. She could not account for her dread of my leaving her. Perhaps it was because

this was the first time I was going from home for more than a day; perhaps it was superstition; but she could not help it, it was a misgiving—a presentiment of evil. She begged me to give up my intention—the storm was ample excuse for it. I was rather put out by this strange waywardness of my dearest Rosamund. It was, however, essential to make a stand at once, for her sake as well as mine, and I laughingly, but absolutely, refused to yield. I was expected, and must go. She became even more urgent in her entreaties, and I felt annoyed and perplexed. At that moment, however, a loud ring at the main entrance was heard above the storm, and interrupted our conversation.

The front door was presently opened, and a visitor admitted.

It was Mr. Apwood, of Brookvale cottage, a gentleman known to us by name, but with whom we had not yet become personally acquainted. Indeed his position, hovering between upper and middle class, might make him hesitate to call upon us uninvited. Originally a provincial lawyer, he had for two or three years joined a London firm, but had lately come down to Meadshire. Here

he indulged in scientific farming on a small scale, and took the lead in agricultural gatherings for pleasure or business, whenever none of the county grandees were present. He was popular among the farmers, and I myself was predisposed in his favour by the courtesy he had shown to poor Maxwell, giving him plenty of good advice and encouragement, at the risk of offending the tenantry round.

Apwood, however, did not come to pay a visit of ceremony, but of business. He had a matter on his mind, he said, which worried him; and he asked to speak to me in private. We retired to the library. Apwood was a tall, fine-looking man, with good features, marred by one defect—the extreme closeness of his eyes. This gave a sinister expression to his face; but his manner was offhand and frank; his voice cheery and good-tempered. He detained me longer than I liked, though what he said had some interest for me.

The last life on the lease of a rather valuable property, the fee of which was mine, had dropped three months since, and neither myself nor Maxwell were aware of it. For aught that transpired we might have remained in ignorance till dooms-

day, had not Apwood volunteered to tell us. This was not merely civil ; it was, as times go, pre-eminently honest ; for he had a beneficial interest in the property, and, on its reversion to me, would be a poorer man by some 50*l.* or 60*l.* per annum. I expressed my sense of his integrity and conscientiousness, but he made light of the matter. He had no choice but to tell me the news ; there was no merit in it—not a particle. He couldn't help being open and straightforward ; 'twas a habit he had. He was only sorry he had not heard of the death before, but the party died abroad. As for Maxwell, he assured me it was no fault of his ; the tenants and yeomen generally were banded against him—threw difficulties in his way—treated him shamefully. I shook him by the hand, and we parted in a friendly manner.

CHAPTER VIII.

QUARTER SESSIONS.

THE storm had abated by the time I reached Stoke-upon-Avon, and in the streets few traces were left, except the rivulets of muddy rain-water pouring along the gutters, and the well-washed appearance of the pavements. At the town-hall, where the sessions were held, was a tolerable gathering of county gentlemen.

Colonel Trump was in the chair: he was a magistrate eminently well qualified for the post; that is to say, he possessed good sense, good temper, a strong voice, and a strong will. These are the cardinal virtues of a good chairman of quarter sessions. Colonel Trump was as much liked as he was respected, and, if he made a mistake, which was very rarely, there were plenty of

men to take his part. Magistrates of some standing shook their heads sagaciously, when any profane critic questioned Colonel Trump's decision on some point of law, and replied that "Trump knew what he was about."

Now and then some trifling difficulty might arise; but it was like an awkward fence, or an ugly brook, out hunting. The colonel stuck his spurs in, plied his whip and his reins, crammed us right at it, and in the twinkling of an eye, we were safely landed, nobody exactly knew how, on the other side.

On the occasion referred to, when I entered the court, the magistrates were discussing county business. A new assize court had been recently built at the expense of the county, and was nearly ready for use; but a few little shortcomings and annoyances had come to light, and the question was how to remedy or remove them. In the first place, as to the internal arrangements of the court: the witness-box, the jury-box, and the judge's seat were so arranged, that it was next to impossible for the judge to hear the witnesses, or for the jury to hear the judge. Then, hardly was the building finished, when an awkward discovery was made

by the high sheriff's chaplain, in the shape of an open common sewer, running along one side of the grounds surrounding the court. The chaplain enjoyed the privilege of a nose more susceptible than that possessed by most country gentlemen, and declared that the effluvium from this common sewer was not only offensive to the sense, but pernicious to the health. The medical officer of the gaol evinced a weak inclination to back up the allegations of the troublesome chaplain.

Many other matters were pitched into the midst of the court, like the contents of a pedler's pack, for promiscuous examination and discussion.

When I entered, Lord Delaville, an elderly nobleman, much respected, was on his legs ; he had had something to do with the selection of the site for the new buildings ; and, wishing to divert attention from the common-sewer question, began a warm attack on the interior arrangements. Judge, jury, witnesses, reporters, magistrates, everybody, were all in the wrong place, and he was under the painful necessity of expressing his opinion that the architect, Fopkins, had made a mess of it—in short,

Fopkins was a failure. He regretted that Mackarel had not been selected as architect. He remembered that when he had “the honour of an interview with his late majesty, George IV., the first gentleman in Europe —” Here the chairman, Colonel Trump, with a face beaming with good-humour, but in an emphatic tone of voice, interrupted his lordship with a suggestion that the morning was wearing away, and that it might be advisable to confine himself to the subject under discussion. Applause followed this recommendation, and before Lord Delaville could collect the thread of his ideas, Mr. Martin Martin rose, with some emotion, and protested against Mr. Fopkins’ character being aspersed behind his back. Mr. Fopkins was a man of talent; he, Mr. Martin Martin, had introduced Fopkins to the notice of the magistrates, and felt that his own character was in jeopardy when Fopkins’ suffered. As for Mackarel, he took the liberty of saying, in confidence, that he considered him a “muff.” Lord Delaville rose indignantly, but Colonel Trump would not see him, and called on Major Blandy.

Major Blandy, having the reputation of being

a wag, was always expected to get up when there was any approach to a quarrel, and pour oil on the waters by eliciting a laugh. Major Blandy observed it was quite true that the judge couldn't hear the witnesses—nor the jury the judge. But he didn't see that it much mattered. Judges' charges often misled the jury, and as for the judge hearing the witnesses, why, give him an ear-trumpet. It would have rather an imposing effect. But the jury could not hear the judge. Well, let the judge talk on his fingers. It was an art soon learned ; and the Court would be all the quieter, if counsel talked on their fingers too.

Mr. Worritt, a sharp old gentleman, said the internal arrangements were a mere *bagatelle*. "But what about the common sewer ? Was it not the noble lord who had urged the adoption of the present site, and rhapsodized about its picturesque appearance, and the beauty of the tranquil little stream that washed the western boundary ? Why, the tranquil little stream was the common sewer ! Has the noble lord no nose ?"

The noble lord rose to explain, but Colonel Trump again would not see him, and called Marsham Mallows. Whereupon his lordship

bustled out of court, with an air of high disdain, and drove home to Delaville Park.

Marsham Mallows was the working man amongst the magistracy. He gave himself up, mind and body, to county business. The gaol, the lunatic asylum, thirteen bridges, and a variety of other matters, enjoyed the advantage of his disinterested but anxious oversight. The finger of Marsham Mallows was everywhere visible. He had introduced an improvement in the machinery by which the gaol treadmill was worked. Formerly, the treadmill revolved without profit, save in its moral action on the minds of the convicts. Now its motive power was utilized. Each revolution of the treadmill turned a wheel connected by wires with a whirligig in the governor's kitchen-garden, to scare the birds.

Marsham Mallows now rose to vindicate the conduct of the building committee. He spoke clearly, and emphatically :—

“ The common sewer must be indicted. It is a nuisance at common law. The judge's seat, witness-box, and jury-box must remain as they are. The arrangement is perfect. All the judges have been consulted, and all, except those who have

actually sat in the court, highly approve of the principle. The judges must know best, because they are judges; honourable gentlemen are not judges."

The speech was long, and the court had thinned considerably when Marsh Mallows sat down amidst warm plaudits from the members of the building committee. General Jones, however, who was the practical man at quarter sessions, rallied the scattered forces of the opposition. He never delivered himself of more than one sentence, but it was always to the purpose. General Jones begged to remind honourable gentlemen that "the proof of the pudding was in the eating."

Having said which, General Jones sat down amidst cheers.

Eustace Pole now sprang abruptly on his legs, and uttered a few impassioned sentences in a rather incoherent voice, and a face growing more crimson every moment. He had prepared his speech, and intended to be eloquent. Colonel Trump saw his opportunity, and in a loud, good-humoured voice, cried out—

"Mr. Eustace Pole—beg your pardon; but are you going to move an amendment to the Building

Committee's Report? Because if not, I think we are a *little* out of order."

Eustace Pole had no amendment ready—never had thought of proposing one. He lost his cue, got confused, and as was his habit when this contingency arrived, began to stutter.

So, after ejaculating one or two ambiguous monosyllables, he paused, gasped for breath, stared at the ventilator in the ceiling, and sat down with sudden emphasis upon his new hat.

The chairman followed up the advantage. Reminded the Court that it was all very well to find fault with the site of the new courts; but the fact was, there was no other site to be had. Suggested that the clerk should write officially to the local authorities respecting the common sewers. Put to the vote with rapid energy, the resolution that the Committee's Report be adopted, and—nobody having quite made up his mind what to do—exclaimed in peremptory accents, "carried unanimously!" blew his nose vigorously, sank back in his chair, and made a sign to the clerk to pass on to the next notice on the agenda paper, viz., "Turnpike accounts. Parson's Acre Lane, and Snobbington Trusts."

It was at this interesting crisis of the day's proceedings, that I felt a friendly gripe upon my arm, and, turning round, beheld Lord Folliott. After a few words of greeting on both sides, he carried me out of court, and hurried me with impatient vehemence along the High Street to the "Royal Oak," where there was luncheon for the magistrates.

"Don't suppose I asked you to come here to listen to all that prosy palaver. No, certainly not. The fact is, that Hazlebury, our present M.P., is going to retire, and I have been discussing the prospects of an election for the county with all our 'bigwigs,' and find them very well disposed to you. Quite warm, I assure you. Claude Cockayne will stand by you. So will Paul Muckleworth. You know Paul? Oh, a right good fellow and awfully fierce against Radicals."

I was rather taken aback by this communication, and said I was too little known, not experienced enough, not enough of a party man.

"Nonsense; you are the right man. We want something fresh and out of the common. Besides, the point of the joke is, there is no one to oppose

you. To be sure, Hartley—he of Mount Maurice—threatens to come forward ; but we are too strong for him, and I think he is beginning to find it out, for he looked prodigious sulky when he came into court this morning."

The idea of entering Parliament, and even of representing the county, had certainly crossed my mind from time to time. But then it was a vision of the future. It did not occur to me that until I had been settled some time at Glenarvon, made friends, and become known in the country, there would be any probability of my coming forward with success. Folliott's zeal somewhat stimulated me, and I began to ask questions, partly to obtain information, partly to gain time for reflection ; and amongst other matters, I inquired about Hartley. Why would not he do for our member ?

Folliott shrugged his shoulders, and said he was a hybrid in politics ; tainted with radicalism ; could not be trusted.

Was there any one else ?

" No," he repeated ; " there really is no eligible candidate." One man was too poor. Another too close-fisted. Another stuttered. Another spoke clearly enough, but then he had nothing to

say. Marsham Mallows was too busy with county matters.

“Mind,” Folliott added, “I am only speaking of Tories—good sound Tories. There are one or two Whigs ready enough, I dare say; but then the county has not sunk so low as to swallow a Whig. Oh, no, not yet.”

By this time we had reached the entrance of the “Royal Oak.” The portico was crowded by idlers and visitors to the town, including witnesses in cases coming on next day, a barrister or two, and some magistrates. The street itself presented a more bustling scene than usual. A line of carriages for which there was no room in the inn coachhouse, flanked one side of the street, and impeded the traffic. Folliott was parted from me for a few moments, as we were pushing our way into the portico. At the same instant there came out from the inn the very man we were talking about—Hartley of Mount Maurice. He averted his face as he passed me. Now, as the reader will remember, I had met Hartley in old times at Sir Hugh Littlecot’s. We had never got on very well together, but still had parted on perfectly friendly terms. So, concluding he had

not recognized me in the crush, I called him by name, loud enough to be heard, and held out my hand. He turned, looked me full in the face with a glance which I could only characterize as one of angry contempt, and hurried away. I was puzzled, surprised, annoyed. A young man, an attorney's clerk, standing by me, said to a friend in a loud whisper, "By Jove! that was cool, wasn't it? Something like the cut direct. Eh, Jack?"

Folliott now rejoined me; he made light of the matter. Either Hartley did not remember me, or was indignant at my being preferred to him as a candidate for the county. "Wait till to-morrow, and then speak to him; he will be cool then. With all his faults, he is a gentleman. His radicalism is not more than skin-deep: passionate, very, but it is soon over. He will be cool to-morrow. Give him line, Chauncey—give him line."

Thus Folliott went on, as we threaded our way through the passage and up the staircase of the inn. In a small sitting-room used by the magistrates there were assembled in imposing conclave several of the leading gentry, or, as Folliott called

them, the “bigwigs,” of Meadshire. Sir Claude Cockayne, as a man of fashion, and *au courant* with the political news of the day, stood prominent amongst them, with his back to the empty fireplace, in an attitude of bland authority, his hands negligently placed behind his coat-tails, his body bent somewhat forward, and his well-whiskered face surmounted by a glossy head of hair, recently arrived from town—one of Truefit’s best efforts—gently turning now to one speaker, now to another, as the conversation circulated round him. He was got up with care—unexceptionable neck-tie, irreproachable frock-coat, linen of the finest, a waistcoat of fawn colour, softly illuminated by sky-blue flowers, and trousers not too loose to hide the baronet’s well-shaped legs. Martin Martin stood by his side, sipping a glass of sherry, and backing up assiduously everything Sir Claude suggested.

Worritt was there too, picking holes in every proposal by whomsoever started. Major Blandy was still in court: Trump always made him stay to the last, as his services in the comic line might be wanted. A few other gentlemen stood or sat in different parts of the room. General Jones

was refreshing himself at a side-table with pale ale and bread and butter. Eustace Pole preferred brandy and water. The excitement of making a speech, he said, upset his system for the rest of the day.

Paul Muckleworth was, however, the real motive power of the party, and did the hard work. Sir Claude was ornamental rather than useful. Paul Muckleworth was a broad-faced, broad-chested squire, with a purple complexion, and a voice like a bassoon.

It was a little awkward for me, as I was personally known to but few of them, and, after various introductions, had to undergo a sort of catechetical examination as to my political creed. At first Sir Claude took the lead, waving his hand gracefully, and explaining that it was a matter of the merest form. General Jones, who was not only practical but good-natured, proposed I should take a tumbler of bitter beer to clear my throat, a proposition warmly seconded by Folliott, who rather disconcerted Cockayne by handing the bottle to him, exclaiming,—

“Come, Cockayne, it will do you good, too! Politics are prosy, even at the best of times.”

Sir Claude gently rejected the offer, and was proceeding in somewhat mincing language to sound my views on the state and prospects of the British constitution, when Muckleworth, rearing himself upright in his chair, interrupted him, exclaiming in a rich, bass voice,—

“The long and the short of it is, Chauncey,—are you true blue?”

“To the back-bone!” responded Folliott, for me.

“Allow Mr. Chauncey to answer for himself, my lord,” interposed Sir Claude, “if you please.”

“Folliott, be quiet!” said Muckleworth, reprovingly.

I felt now more at my ease, and in a few words satisfied the company as to the orthodoxy of my views. Then followed a long and desultory conversation on the line of tactics we were to adopt to secure support. I heard Sir Hugh Littlecot’s name mentioned, and listened with interest.

“How will he go?” asked Worrritt.

“Right, sir, right!” rejoined Muckleworth. “I have a letter of his in my pocket now. He will not pledge himself to Chauncey, because he has heard a rumour that Hartley may come for-

ward ; and Hartley, you know, is, or was, a friend of the family. But he says Chauncey is a very proper man to represent the county.”

“ He is off for Italy, so he cannot help us except by putting the screw on his tenants,” said Worritt.

“ Well, sir, and that’s what we want. England expects every landlord to do his duty. ‘Tis an awful crisis ! Yes, sir, an awful crisis !” and Muckleworth shook me by the hand, with an energy that brought tears to my eyes.

I was pleased to hear that Sir Hugh had so far conquered his wounded feelings as to write of me in calm and even complimentary terms. My course appeared tolerably clear. An opportunity offered itself which it would be unwise to neglect. True, I should have preferred to remain quietly in the country many months longer, in the enjoyment of Rosamund’s sweet society, and the freedom and ease of a country life. But then this could not last for ever : I had looked forward to entering on a parliamentary life some time or other. The avenue was opened to me unexpectedly, it were folly to turn my back upon it. “ There is a tide in the affairs of men,” &c. Such

reflections passed through my mind in an under-current during all this interview, and by the time we parted my resolution was fully taken. It was decided that I should issue my address to the electors of Meadshire the moment Hazlebury had decided on retiring.

At dinner that evening Hartley was not visible, and I felt rather relieved by his absence. It was clear there was some mistake or misunderstanding, and I was convinced that five minutes' private conversation would set all straight.

The magistrates' dinner at the Royal Oak was rather noisy, but pleasant and sociable withal. Men met there who lived too far apart to meet often anywhere else. There was a good-humoured conflict of opinions, an interchange of gossip and county news, rival anecdotes of hunting and shooting during the past season; a good story or two bottled up for months past by Blandy, or others of a conversational turn, for the express gratification of the company, and now poured forth generally amidst hilarious applause. Country gentlemen love a joke, and are not too critical as to its intrinsic merits. Then a sprinkling of young barristers, the chaplain of the gaol, and a cavalry

officer or two from Highbury barracks, imparted an heterogeneous flavour, and made every one feel more at home.

People drank more wine then than they do now-a-days; but Colonel Trump's superintendence was not wanting at the dinner table any more than in the court of quarter sessions. He maintained discipline amidst the drawing of champagne corks, and the drinking of healths. This he chiefly effected by making every man feel, that wherever he sat or whatever he said, Trump's eye was upon him. If any youthful magistrate or smooth-faced barrister was apparently getting a little elated and noisy, Colonel Trump in a sonorous voice, but the most gentlemanly suavity of manner, invited him by name to take a glass of wine. The effect was electrical. All eyes were turned upon the individual named, and amidst a general hush of conversation the ceremony was gravely but courteously performed. This little manœuvre was generally successful. But when, as happened sometimes, though rarely, the whole company were tending to a degree of excitement that Colonel Trump deemed indecorous, his custom was in a voice of ringing energy to call upon the vice-

chairman to perform a similar ceremony. The solemn words, “Mr. Vice, a glass of wine?” reverberated down the whole length of the table, and tranquillity was as a general rule instantly restored. After dinner only one toast was allowed, and one speech. The toast was “the King!” the speech was “God bless him!” Soon afterwards, it was Colonel Trump’s practice to retire, for he was wont to say that unless he got his quiet rubber of whist and his dish of tea, he never felt his head clear on the bench next morning.

The great joke of the dinner was Major Blandy’s. It turned on a haunch of venison sent by Lord Abermaur, expressly for the magistrates’ consumption. It was awfully high, and no one but Trump, who eat it out of respect to the lord lieutenant, Marsham Mallows, who, having a cold in the] head, had lost his sense of smell, and a couple of barristers, were able to touch it. The venison had been buried a fortnight to keep it fresh; and Blandy declared that the remains of a valuable coachhorse of his lordship’s, lately deceased, had been accidentally dug up instead, and distributed in joints all over the county. The worst of it was, that Folliott, in order to vex

Marsham Mallows, affected to believe it was quite true.

"By the by, Mallows," inquired Mr. Worritt, "have they been making any more experiments with the gaol prisoners lately? I heard the visiting committee and the governor were going to borrow a cholera patient from the hospital, to test the truth of the contagion theory."

The chaplain of the gaol, a worthy man, lately appointed, sank back horrified in his chair.

"Mr. Chaplain, a glass of wine," cried Folliott. "You will think nothing of these things a year hence."

"Allow me to join you," exclaimed Mallows, "and permit me to set Worritt right. The idea was not to borrow a cholera patient, but merely his bed and bedding;—quite a different thing, my lord, you will allow —"

"For the patient, yes."

"Permit me: the intention was to ascertain whether cholera was contagious. Very well; how was it to be done? why thus." And Mallows told off his words on each of his fingers in a clear and deliberate manner:—"Procure your cholera bed —"

“First catch your hare,” interposed one of the barristers.

“Procure your bed, from a hospital or anywhere else you like; place it on the bedstead of your condemned criminal, but tell him nothing about it—let him go to bed in peace—watch the result. This is experiment number one.”

“Mr. Chaplain, allow me the pleasure of taking champagne with you,” exclaimed Major Blandy to the poor chaplain, who had again fallen back in his chair. “Mallows is talking ‘shop.’”

“Experiment number two is this,” resumed Mallows. “Take a condemned criminal, solemnly inform him that he is about to occupy the bed of a patient who died of cholera—place him in his own bed as usual—watch the result.”

“Barbarous!” murmured the chaplain, to a cavalry officer by his side.

“Humbug!” interjected the other.

“The experiments have been tried in St. Petersburg with the happiest results,” continued Mallows. “In experiment number one, where the man slept in the bed of the cholera patient but did not know it, he woke up lively and well next morning. In experiment number two, the man died of

cholera in six hours ! Mr. Chaplain, allow me the pleasure of taking wine with you."

Presently the cloth was removed. Colonel Trump summoned Mr. Chaplain to say grace ; fifty or sixty heads bent forwards ; the colonel stood erect ; then the port and sherry perambulated the table. The King's health was drunk, and shortly afterwards the company broke up. Some adjourned to tea, tobacco, and whist ; but the majority rode or drove off to their homes in the vicinity, and among them my friend Folliott.

CHAPTER IX.

A GROSS INSULT.

THE next morning my groom rode over from Glenarvon with letters and newspapers; there was a long one from Rosamund.

"DEAREST HERBERT,

"I send letters, newspapers, and a new *Quarterly* for you to read driving home. The storm passed off after you left, so I hope you did not take cold. It has been very dreary here, of course. No one called all day after you and Mr. Apwood went away. By the by, I have discovered a great likeness between him and the lady in peagreen velvet hanging in the corner of the north gallery; I will tell you presently how I noticed it. Well, no one called all day. I took a walk to see what mischief the storm had done; the flowers are sadly ill-used, and the south terrace walk is

crimson with rose-leaves ; an elm has been blown down in the park, to the consternation of the rooks who have been talking about it ever since. It was solitary and *triste*, but still worse indoors. However, I went in at last, and took tea in the hall ; then amused myself by wandering about and imagining myself a heroine of romance shut up in a gloomy château ; the furniture looked grimmer and quainter than ever, and the strange noises in the passages were all the louder now I was alone. Only think ; I peeped into the room where the German courier hung himself ! Was not that bold ? Well, I felt a little excited at length, and running back to the hall, sat down to read the *Fortunes of Nigel* to distract my thoughts. All was still, scarcely a mouse stirring—rather unusual for Glenarvon, was it not?—when a tremendous crash burst on my ears, as if the whole gallery was coming down. You may imagine what a start I gave, and, I am ashamed to add, what a scream ! What was it ? Why, the picture of the mysterious pea-green lady in the north gallery. The nail on which it hung had given way. ‘ Shocking, shocking ! ’ cried David, in his Welsh fashion, as soon as I had mustered

self-possession to ring the bell. ‘How like,’ I exclaimed, ‘to that Mr. Apwood who called here to-day!’ But David looked preternaturally grave, and as soon as the picture had been raised up and fixed in its old corner, away he went in his creaking shoes, muttering to himself all the while. This was my first trouble that evening—there was another coming. Now do not smile, for the second calamity vexed me so that I could scarce sleep all night. My maid Louise is going. That tiresome Lady Annandale wants her to go to Nice with her, and Louise says she is under obligations and must go. I suspect she is bribed by offers of higher wages, though I am loath to think so, for she was always a good girl. I was angry, and set her off crying, for which I am sorry; but I cried myself too, which was a sort of *amende honorable*. Now, you must be very good, and find me another lady’s-maid—a real *treasure*, though how to get one in this barbarous part of the world, is rather a puzzle! However, do your best for me; I am sure I deserve it; do not I, dear Herbert? Instead of scolding you for running away without wishing me good-bye, here have I written you rather an amusing letter than

otherwise. I rose at seven to write it. But do not treat me so cavalierly again. I was angry at first, and mounting my horse set off in pursuit. The rain, however, damped my displeasure, and prudence resumed her sway, so I rode home again before I had gone a mile. However, mind that you come home this evening ; that is, if you love me, which perhaps you do *infiniment peu*.

“Ever yours,

“ROSAMUND.”

I had intended to stop at Stoke-upon-Avon another day, but this letter decided me to return. It was true that, in leaving Rosamund so abruptly, I had acted apparently with harshness—but only apparently. It was essential to convince her that at no time would I permit weak impulses of affection to turn me aside from the path of duty. Still her loving nature must have been tried and wounded, and it was now desirable, as I had carried my point by firmness, to show her all the kindness and indulgence in my power.

I ordered my carriage, and was preparing to start, when the recollection of Hartley’s strange conduct unpleasantly crossed my mind, and made

me pause. It was necessary I should see him without further delay. I have always had great faith, when misunderstandings of this kind occur, in the effect of a frank, open, and friendly remonstrance, not by letter—for a letter often aggravates the evil—but in a personal interview. The tone of the voice, the glance of the eye, the whole aspect and bearing of a man whose intentions are thoroughly honest and well-meaning, give more weight to half a dozen words, than the highest eloquence and ingenuity can impart to a letter of as many pages.

Besides, in this case, there was a possibility that Hartley, in the crowd and confusion, did not recognize me. I must see him, and that before I returned home.

On inquiring, however, at his lodgings, it appeared that he had started for Mount Maurice the evening before, and thither I must follow him. My groom was despatched homewards with a message that I should be at Glenarvon in the course of the afternoon, and I directed my coachman to drive me to Mount Maurice, about ten miles distant from Stoke-upon-Avon, and the same from Glenarvon. The weather was very

calm and balmy after the storm, and the air was full of the sweet perfume of an English spring. The roads, though hilly, were in excellent order, and the drive to Mount Maurice very enjoyable. From the lodge-gate to the house the approach through the park was long, winding, and rather steep. The horses fell into a walk, and leaning back in my carriage I dreamily enjoyed the beautiful landscape spread out before me, that at every turn of the road assumed a fresh and more beautiful aspect. As we reached a higher level, the view expanded, and the distant mountains of Wales lifted their purple ridges over the nearer hills.

The valley below from which we had just emerged looked like a broad, magnificent forest. The elms thickly crowding the hedgerows, the hazel copses, interspersed with wide-spreading oak, that clothed the slopes of the hills, were blended confusedly together in one broad sea of many-shadowed verdure, broken now and then by the thatched roofs of cottages and farm-buildings, the shining slate of some more pretentious edifice, and the gray old tower of the village church. The park itself, through which we were

ascending, was well and tastefully planted. Each bend of the road was enveloped in clumps of Portugal laurel and other evergreens, feathering to the ground, and relieved by lilacs, laburnum, and broom.

Here and there a huge mass of double-blossomed gorse scented the air, or stately specimens of pine and cedar rose up from the greensward, and intercepted the rich landscape beyond.

A slight breeze tempered the warmth of the noonday sun, and as we slowly neared the house, and beheld the windows reaching to the ground, shaded by a long verandah covered with passion-flower and clematis, and roses in full flower, I could not but feel that Hartley, whatever might be his disposition, possessed in this beautiful place a perpetual resource from the vexing cares of life, and tranquil consolation for the pressure of remembered sorrows.

A groom was riding slowly up and down the gravel sweep in front of the house, leading Hartley's horse. I was pleased to find I had arrived just in time to see Hartley and have out my say. One of the men-servants was standing at the entrance door as my carriage stopped, and at that

moment Hartley himself appeared in the hall, dressed as if for riding. He drew back the instant he caught sight of me, but the servant followed him, mentioning my name, and I prepared to alight.

To my annoyance, however, the servant speedily returned, and with some embarrassment of manner said that "Master" sent his compliments, and was too much engaged to see me. This sounded like a polite attempt to soften a rude message. I kept my temper, and desired the man to inquire when it would be convenient for Mr. Hartley to have a few minutes' conversation with me.

Several minutes elapsed before the man returned. He was red and confused.

"Beg pardon, sir, but master says there is no answer."

My anger now almost got the better of me. The man murmured a well-meant suggestion that I had better write a letter to "Master." No doubt, I had better have taken his advice; but at the moment I perceived Hartley at the open drawing-room window, waiting to see me depart. He was not ten yards from me, though probably he thought the verandah and flowering creepers hid

him from my sight. I became more and more provoked, and, springing from my carriage, resolved to come to an explanation, and set the matter to rights at once. The instant I approached the window he drew back to the farther end of the room, sat down, and took up a book.

"Mr. Hartley," I said, in a firm, but cautious tone of voice, "I am sure there is some misunderstanding between us, which a few moments' conversation will clear up. You are too much of a gentleman to wish to insult any man, more especially one who has never done or said anything that you could justly find fault with. Deal with me, at all events, in a fair and candid spirit, and tell me what has induced you to treat me thus."

As I stepped forward a pace or two into the room, Hartley rose hastily, and I had a full view of his countenance as he turned towards the light. I now noticed, what in the hurry of yesterday had escaped me, that he was greatly altered since I used to meet him in old times at the Littlecots'. He had always been rather thin and spare in form, but his complexion used to be clear and florid, and his eye bright and lively. Now his face was

almost sallow, and his features drawn. There was an excitement in his manner that surprised me.

“Is it possible?” he exclaimed, as if speaking to himself. “What, actually under my roof!—This is not to be borne!”

I was again about to speak, when, with heightened colour and kindling eyes he waved his hand, saying hurriedly, and in a low voice,—

“Sir, I call Heaven to witness that I have shunned a meeting for both our sakes. Why force yourself upon me? Why goad me on to do what I may regret hereafter?—pray, sir, leave me. Let us part and never meet again—for both our sakes, sir—for both our sakes.”

He still drew back towards the farther end of the room, and motioned me away.

“Explain yourself, Mr. Hartley. In what have I given offence? If you refer to the coming election, I can speedily set your mind at rest.”

“Set my mind at rest! You set my mind at rest!—You!—I can no longer endure this insolence!” He uttered these words in the same hurried tone; then suddenly raising his voice to a loud and angry key, advanced towards me,

and exclaimed with an oath—"Leave the house instantly, sir, and enter it again at your peril!"

I was astonished at his conduct. It was not merely violent and insulting, it was savage.

I drew myself up to my full height, and warned him that I should call him to strict account for his conduct; when, apparently carried away by the violence of his passion, he struck suddenly and fiercely at my face with the heavy horsewhip he had in his hand. Taken by surprise as I was, I contrived, by hastily raising my arm, to ward off the full force of the blow; but the point of the whip caught the side of my neck, and instantly drew blood. Stung by the sharp pain and the grossness of the insult, I rushed at my assailant with rage in my heart.

No sooner had Hartley struck me than I believe he repented of it. An expression of regret escaped him; but too incensed to listen, I clutched him by the throat with all my force, and drove him backwards almost to the ground. His passion revived, and with a sudden effort he broke from my grasp, and raised his whip once more. I seized it, and for a few seconds we struggled for possession of it. Through pure accident his head

came in contact with the angle of the open sash door. I can truthfully aver that the blow was in no ways a severe one, neither was I the cause of it. However, it seemed somewhat to stun him, his hold on the whip relaxed, and twisting it from his hands, I flung it out of the window, exclaiming,—

“Sir I will not disgrace myself by inflicting on you the chastisement you richly deserve. I shall expect satisfaction of another kind. You shall hear from me this evening.”

The pallor of his face, the blueish tinge on his lips, showed the violence of his excitement, as Hartley replied :—

“Leave me, miserable man that you are ! leave me ! You have brought this on yourself. Your hateful presence roused me to fury. Yes, you shall have your satisfaction, and that shortly. Leave me, or I must send for those who will make you !”

He raised his voice, and gesticulated angrily as he spoke.

I know not what unhappy, discreditable scene might have occurred, had not the entrance of some of the servants interrupted the interview, and

restored both of us to some degree of self-possession. I repeated—" You shall hear from me this evening," and immediately left the house. The carriage had been drawn to a short distance off, under the shadow of a large cedar, and as I hastened towards it, a little dog ran after me with an affectionate whine of delight, and licked my hand. Heated, confused as I was, my heart palpitating with indignation, this little incident touched me, and moistened my eyes with tears. I stooped down for a moment to caress the animal, and recognized, with mingled pain and pleasure, but with no slight surprise, that it was an old friend —a beautiful little silken-haired spaniel belonging to Ada Littlecot, always a favourite of mine, and whose recollection of my kindness was evidently still vivid. Leaping round me and upon me in agonies of pleasure, it paid no heed to the summons of Hartley's butler, who stood at the front door calling it by name, and whistling vehemently. I took the little creature in my arms, fondled and caressed it for a few moments, and then gave it, much against its own inclination, in charge to the servant. How came the dog at Mount Maurice? At first I was perplexed, but

on reflection accounted for it by concluding that the Littlecots on going abroad had left their little favourite to the care of Hartley, a friend and neighbour.

How changed were now my feelings as the carriage rapidly descended the hill ! I gazed upon the glorious landscape with indifference—almost with impatience : the sunshine was oppressive to me : the song of a lark high overhead in the blue sky irritated and vexed me : the perfume of the lilac and the gorse sickened me. Shaken in mind and body, deeply humiliated but thirsting for revenge, my dress torn and disordered, my face hot with anger, and smeared with the blood drawn by that cruel blow, I sat back in my carriage, and with my hat pushed over my eyes endeavoured to collect my thoughts.

Why had Hartley treated me so savagely, so brutally ? Was it jealousy at my having been selected as a candidate to stand for the county ? Impossible. Was it his friendship with the Littlecots, and sympathy with them under the wrong they had suffered at my hands ? It seemed improbable. For though on friendly terms, there never seemed any close intimacy between him

and them. Was he in his right senses? I almost doubted it. These thoughts passed rapidly through my mind as the carriage bore me homewards. But what was to come next? Of course I must fight him. I must send a friend to arrange a meeting as soon as possible.

Yet as the familiar landscape of Glenarvon gradually unfolded before me, I confess that the prospect of a duel greatly troubled me. I thought of Rosamund, and my soul was filled with bitterness and remorse. Fool that I was to see that man! Why did I go near him? Hartley was right. I should have kept away for both our sakes. Why not have written?—why not have passed him by unnoticed?

Yet how could I have foreseen such an outbreak of insane hostility? I, who had never wilfully injured him—I, who had ever prided myself on adhering strictly to the path of frank, manly, and straightforward integrity, showing due respect to the just claims of others, as I required them to show respect to mine? How could I have anticipated so frantic, so malignant a reception?

Well, I must fight him. Yet my anger had

somewhat cooled, my yearning for vengeance somewhat subsided.

I had been wont philosophically to sneer at duelling. What was the good of duelling? It was a relique of barbarous times. The ordeal of combat, without the faith that partly justified it, and certainly gave it dignity. The result was no test of the merits of the dispute. Skill and nerve might give victory to the guilty. More so now than in the olden times, for then all were familiar with arms; to-day few are. I had scoffed at duelling, and avowed my resolution to set the custom at defiance. But when the trial came I was found wanting. Two or three circumstances gave it peculiar aggravation. The great insult inflicted on me. The probability of its being known all over the county in a week's time. A pleasant introduction to a new neighbourhood and a new circle of friends! A favourable augury for my success at the coming election! The story would be that I had been severely horsewhipped by Hartley, and kicked out of the house; and that I had meekly submitted to the insult. Then came the remembrance of the Littlecots, and the cold looks and ill-disguised hostility of their

friends towards me. Of course, the story of my conduct to Ada would be spread abroad with redoubled industry, and improved and embroidered, to prejudice the world against me. There was no course but to fight.

By this time we had almost reached the lodge ; but I hastily ordered the coachman to drive me to Abermaur Castle. It was distant some miles, and my horses were rather fagged ; but there was no alternative. I must see Folliott and ask him to be my friend.

Folliott was well adapted for such an office, having been out twice himself. On the second occasion he received a bullet wound, extending from the wrist to the elbow of the right arm, and returned the compliment, by shooting away the lobe of his adversary's right ear. Not that Folliott was at all quarrelsome. On the contrary, he was the kindest and pleasantest of men, but unluckily could not always hold his tongue. The duel which had almost cost him his life arose from his looking over the shoulder of a brother officer—it was when he was in the 12th Lancers—whilst shaving before a glass. Folliott, in perfect good-humour, exclaimed — “ Well, I declare I

never saw two such ugly faces in my life!" and, although Folliott had placed his own face in the same category with the shaver's, somehow or other it was not taken in good part. Anger and high words ensued, no apology of Folliott's could satisfy the other's wounded feelings, and a duel ensued, with the satisfactory consequences named. I may add too, that in those days duelling was much more in vogue than now, when it is happily almost unheard of in this country.

CHAPTER X.

HONOURABLE SATISFACTION.

“ HA, Herbert! delighted to see you so soon again! Very good of you to tear yourself away from the fascinations of quarter sessions. Does not Trump charge the jury like a gentleman? A right, genial, cheerful, knock-me-down fashion, which no twelve country bumpkins living betwixt Severn and Wye can stand up against! Here, sit down—no, not on that sofa, my fishing-tackle is there, and you may find the hooks unpleasant; but take that arm-chair.”

Thus Folliott welcomed me, half rising from the rack of a too easy chair, where he reclined, clad in a seedy shooting-coat, dusty overalls, and a hat of battered and ill-used aspect. It was in a room in Abermaur Castle specially appropriated

to Folliott's use, being adjacent to the billiard-room, and far enough from the ladies to admit of a cigar.

"You see," he volubly proceeded, "I have been riding *incognito*. It saves me from the bore of being waylaid by personal friends, or troublesome tenants of 'my lord's.' Well, you are going to begin canvassing? No, not yet? Depend upon my assistance at the proper time; only give me a few days' notice, because I must rub up my politics. At present, I declare I could not explain the meaning of the corn-laws to save my life! A bulwark of the constitution, no doubt; but that is all I know; and we must not be always ringing the changes on bulwarks, must we? I am glad Hartley's thrown overboard, for I believe he was deuced unsound on the corn-laws."

The mention of that name enabled me to interrupt him. I unbared my neck, and showed the livid weal that Hartley's whip had left there. I coloured with renewed anger mixed with shame as I did so, and hastily described the encounter of that morning.

My companion's languid frame was roused by the recital. He sprang from his chair, and with

eyes full of fire and animation shook me warmly by the hand.

“This is monstrous!” he cried. “I thought him hot-tempered, and quick to take offence, but this is downright ungentlemanly ferocity. Why, a mere navvy could not behave more like a ruffian! We must teach him better manners. Here, you look tired and excited: step into my dressing-room, there is hot water laid on; you must take a warm bath; it will refresh you and steady your nerves. Meantime I will order luncheon for you, and we will discuss the matter quietly and comfortably over a bottle of claret.”

It was arranged that I should return home, and hold myself in readiness at an early hour next morning to accompany Folliott to the place appointed for the hostile meeting. The outskirts of a common at no great distance from Mount Maurice appeared a favourable spot, and half an hour would take us there. If all went well I might be home to breakfast at the usual hour.

On reaching home two letters were put into my hand as I entered the great hall. One was from Apwood, my recent visitor; it was marked “confidential,” and the purport was to give me

friendly warning of a circumstance that had come to his knowledge. Hartley had the day before declared his intention of contesting the seat for the county, and Apwood, knowing the feeling of the magistrates down at quarter sessions, and that I had accepted their invitation to come forward, thought he was only acting the part of a neighbour, who admired my political principles, and was prepared to exert all his humble influence on my behalf, to put me on my guard, and enable me to take the field in good time.

I flung the letter aside: the election for the present had ceased to be a subject of any interest. Thoughts of deeper import possessed me. It was a thing of the past; yet I could not but be struck by this new proof of Hartley's strange and unwearyed hostility.

The other letter was from Colonel Dinder, a gentleman whom Hartley, in anticipation of a hostile message, had empowered to act as his second. I went to my library, and scribbled a few lines to Colonel Dinder, and also to Folliott.

Rosamund was out when I first arrived, but I had hardly finished and despatched my notes

when I heard her musical voice outside my window, on the lawn, in conversation with the gardener. I rose with eagerness to greet her. Short as our separation had been, we had not been so long apart since our marriage. I hastened towards the window, but at the moment of opening it, paused and shuddered.

The recollection of the duel flashed across my mind. How should I meet her?—how conceal my agitation of mind, and the weight upon my spirits?

I turned hastily, and, leaving the room, passed by the servants' passages into the back part of the house, and from thence into the wood that flanked the garden, and extended some distance up the hill behind.

I own it, I candidly own it, that the thought of Rosamund unmanned me, and I shrank for the moment into an abject, shuddering coward.

I wandered to and fro in the shady paths, sometimes diverging heedlessly into the bushes and low shrubs, sometimes stumbling against the branches of the larger trees, unmindful of bruises and scratches, but never standing still for a moment. It would have been intolerable to have ceased moving.

I pictured to my mind the whole scene of the duel. I beheld the leisurely preparations at the place of meeting: pacing the ground; whispered conversation between the seconds; unlocking the pistol-case; loading of the deadly weapons. I saw myself stand to receive Hartley's fire; I heard the click of the lock as the pistol was cocked; then the word given, and the sharp reports. I saw one of the combatants fall; he writhes for a moment, then is still; all present hasten to his aid. I see the efforts made to staunch that crimson stream issuing from the heart of one already a senseless corpse.

Then the slow procession homewards. The trampling of many footsteps on the gravel drive in front of the house—the bell gently rung—the low earnest voices—the smothered exclamations of grief and sympathy—the sound as of a heavy weight borne along the entrance passage into the great hall—then the sudden piercing scream of the agonized wife—the horror—the unutterable woe—the deathlike despair.

How long I hurried to and fro—muttering to myself with clenched teeth, and arms folded over my breast, and eyes bent on the ground, at one

time picturing the future, at another time cursing the folly and rashness of which I had been guilty in seeking an interview with Hartley—I know not. But the sun had set, and all was dim and shadowy under the interlacing branches of the elms, when, at a sharp turning of one of the walks, I felt myself on a sudden clasped in a fond and passionate embrace; and knew, ere I raised my eyes, that I was in the arms of my beloved Rosamund.

For some moments I could not speak. The revulsion of feeling was strong, and I leaned my head upon her shoulder, struggling to maintain my self-possession.

To many, no doubt, what I am now writing may seem forced and unnatural, and my conduct weak and inconsistent. But if so, one thing will be clear—that they have never loved as I loved. My trepidation and misery of mind were not on my own account. I lacked neither vigour of will nor strength of nerve. It was the thought of my wife, my young and beautiful wife, for whom I had sacrificed so much and suffered so much, and whom in the peace of married life I loved more truly and devotedly than even in the first

strength and ardour of my passion; it was this thought that for a time, but only for a time, chilled my blood and prostrated my courage.

Rosamund had sought for me all over the house; and at length, hearing I was somewhere in the wood, grew anxious at my continued absence, and, throwing a shawl over her head, hastened in quest of me. It was dark, as I have said, beneath that canopy of leaves and branches, but she had discerned a figure hurrying with uncertain footsteps hither and thither, and on approaching recognized her husband, and clasped me to her heart. My agitated manner and hasty gestures had already alarmed her. Throwing back the shawl over her shoulders, she gazed at me with alarm, and in my look of mingled pity, love, and misery, read the announcement of some great calamity past or to come.

“Herbert,” she exclaimed, drawing me closer towards her, “you cannot deceive me: some great misfortune has befallen us. You are in trouble of mind. Give me your confidence; let me share your bitter grief. Speak to me, dear friend, speak to me!”

These and other hurried words escaped her.

I remained silent: there was a prolonged struggle within me. Could I, dared I, tell her the dreadful truth, that to-morrow her husband might return home stained with the blood of a fellow-creature, or be laid at her feet a corpse? Well, my faith in her love was strong, my trust in the energy of her character was unswerving. With all her tendency to the marvellous and romantic, she possessed a high, courageous spirit that no danger could easily daunt, when she felt she was in the path of duty.

Yet how could I deliberately condemn her to a night of horrible anticipation, almost as bad as the reality? How could I know whether the strong and faithful heart might not fail in sustaining the bodily frame; and the powers of nature give way at the very moment when I should need all my calmness and composure.

But there was another difficulty.

I dreaded lest in discussing the painful and humiliating encounter with Hartley, I should be entangled in a subject I wished of all others to avoid—I mean my former engagement with Ada Littlecot.

Rosamund's eager questionings would certainly

lead me into painful embarrassment. Already the fact that Hartley alone, of all our neighbours, had not visited us, had caused Rosamund uneasiness. I could not disguise from myself that Hartley's sympathy with the Littlecots, acting on a mind morbidly susceptible, might have caused that explosion of resentment of which I had been so lately a victim.

I felt if I divulged the duel, everything else must follow. I should have to rip up the past—shake Rosamund's faith in my stability of character; expose myself to rebuke for my long secrecy respecting Miss Littlecot; render necessary a multitude of explanations, always painful, but especially so now. And all for what? Perhaps, after all, and indeed not improbably, I should come out of the duel unharmed; and in that case, what needless misery should I have inflicted on my darling! A misery that many, many years would not avail to blot out from her memory.

These thoughts rushed through my mind very swiftly; I was not long silent. With a great effort, and summoning all my energy, I answered Rosamund in a light, careless, and even joyous tone.

What it cost me none can imagine. I yearned to pour forth all my sorrows, all my anguish, all my terror, and open my heart to receive the comfort and strength that would flow from her deep sympathy. But I crushed every weak, unmanly instinct, and sternly determined to keep my own counsel, and bear my burden alone. To some extent I succeeded in quieting her anxiety, and disarming her suspicion. Yet I could see that she was far from satisfied ; I could see too that she was hurt and disappointed. She had prayed me to trust her, and I had evidently withheld my confidence. Drawing her arm in mine we returned to the house.

Dinner was waiting for us. I could not eat, but found some wine refresh and invigorate me. Talking with an effort on many indifferent subjects, and striving to appear gay and at my ease, the evening passed slowly away. Ever and anon Rosamund's eyes were fixed upon me with an expression of imploring anxiety. Once more ere we retired to rest, did she beseech me to tell her all that was in my mind. So closely did she question me, that I was compelled to admit that I was harassed by painful intelligence received that day,

and made a promise that all should be told her to-morrow. This somewhat reassured and pacified her.

At ten o'clock came a mounted messenger from Abermaur Castle with a note from Folliott, explaining to me the arrangements for next day. I desired the man to wait, and after Rosamund had retired to rest, I went into the library, and wrote a few lines in reply.

The long agony of that night must not be dwelt upon. Wearied with agitation of mind and the exertions of the day past, I slept at times, but only by fits and snatches, waking up suddenly with a painful start. Sometimes it was a ghastly dream, sometimes an imaginary noise that roused me. The sound of a carriage driving up to the front door—the ringing of a bell—the slamming of doors—something moving in the room—cries of distress far off in the public road. These and such like fancies haunted me all night, whilst never for a moment was the thought of the coming duel absent from my mind, but mingled with my dreams, and with the illusions of my waking brain. To increase my trouble of mind, I heard more than once during that miserable night the

dear companion by my side sobbing as if her heart would break, in ignorance that I was awake and listening.

My journey on the previous day had indeed been unpropitious, and her misgivings seemed likely to be realized. At all events, conscious that something was amiss, Rosamund remembered her fears at parting from me, and felt her anxiety and alarm grow hourly more intense.

Morning came at last, and with it thoughts like those of Tennyson :—

“ Ah, sad and strange, as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square.”

Rosamund, exhausted, had fallen into a deep slumber. I left the room at an early hour without awaking her, and prepared myself for the work before me.

The sun was rising bright and cloudless over the long bank of mist that enveloped the mountains of Wales ; there was a busy motion in the woods and shrubberies as the fresh morning breeze passed through them. I listened to the song of birds, the distant lowing of cattle, the mowers

whetting their scythes on the lawn below my dressing-room windows, and resigned myself for a few moments to the soothing influence of the scene.

Now that the meeting with Hartley was close at hand, I was calmer and more collected. It is so with many men in whom vigour of mind contends for mastery with a certain warmth and quickness of imagination. As the time for action approaches they brace themselves for the struggle, and put down with a firm hand all emotions that would weaken or distract them. So tranquil did my mind become by the time I was ready to set forth from Glenarvon, that it almost surprised me.

It was not the peace of apathy, nor yet of religious trust, though the latter feeling was not wholly absent. I could not think the course I was taking acceptable to the Great Being who had placed me in this sphere of probation, yet I felt an earnest wish to place my case in His hands, and to submit with the docility of a child to His decision. Religion had hitherto occupied my thoughts but little, and could not have been said to have had any direct influence on my

conduct. At that moment, however, I was so far religious as to desire in a dim, uncertain way to be so.

The prevailing thought was a wish that the moment of danger were come. I no longer shrank from it; I longed for it every instant, and felt a kind of solemn joy when, on reaching the lodge gate, I perceived a carriage waiting for me, and Folliott himself advancing to greet me. He seized both my hands, and pressed them affectionately. Although he endeavoured to talk in his usual offhand manner, I could see that he was secretly anxious and uneasy. We sprang into the carriage, and drove at a rapid pace in the direction of Mount Maurice. After a pause, Folliott exclaimed,—

“He will make no apology.”

“I hardly expected it,” was my reply.

“Well, I hate riddles and conundrums—always did—never was a good hand at them—hate all mysterious persons, including that individual we used to know at school—who was it?—oh, the Sphinx! Dinder is as bad I assure you; I can make nothing of him. It is clear Hartley does not take the election much to heart; there is

something else behind. Do you mind my smoking a cigar? I don't offer you one, as your hand will be steadier without it. Well, to return. Dinder makes dark allusions to the Littlecots. I press him for an explanation; pointing out that as a man of the world he must see that Hartley was in the wrong—entirely in the wrong. A horsewhip is much too personal for the nineteenth century—altogether low and ungentlemanly. Dinder does nothing but shake his head, and shrug his shoulders. The thing is done he says—Hartley will not give way an inch—the men must fight. This cigar is infamous! I must take to a clay pipe before long, I do believe!"

He flung away his cigar, impatiently, and then, looking me full in the face, said:—

"Herbert, my dear fellow, of course you will understand I don't wish to hurt your feelings, but my conviction is, that some woman is at the bottom of the mischief. There's a woman in the case, depend upon it! I see you are not pleased at my saying so, but I like to be open. I suspect your affair with Ada Littlecot has to do with it. Was Hartley ever smitten with her? Never mind; I will not press the point—I know it is

not a pleasant subject; not that I thought you much to blame; I am no Puritan."

He lit another cigar, and for a few minutes we drove on in silence. It was useless to canvass the matter further: as for the Littlecots, it might be that some exaggerated version of my conduct had reached Hartley, but that he was attached to Ada I had never heard.

As we approached the lane leading to the common fixed for the place of meeting, I thought I heard the sound of horses' hoofs behind the carriage.

Hastily leaning out of the window I noticed a horseman about a hundred yards off, apparently following us at a steady trot. No sooner, however, did he see my head, than he reined in his horse, and falling into a walk, allowed us to leave him behind. A few minutes afterwards I again looked out, and perceived him still following, though at a considerable distance.

"Who is that fellow?" asked Folliott, who had looked out at the same moment as myself.

"It seems to me to be Apwood, a man formerly a lawyer, living in my parish," I answered; "but it is strange that he should seem to be on our track."

"Oh, I know him; a clever sort of fellow, and a good friend of yours, I assure you."

"A good friend?—how so?"

"I mean in the political line. There were a lot of us at the agricultural dinner over at Highbury Down—squires, farmers, and a parson or two. Apwood spoke up bravely for you as a proper man for the county. He will do you good service you may depend upon it: he knows a 'parcel of folk' hereabouts, as the farmers say, and will work for you at market-dinners, ploughing-matches, and such like gatherings. He sat by me at the dinner, and, to tell the truth, I am not sure he did not spur me on to propose you to Paul Muckleworth, and the rest of them, at quarter sessions. I don't see him now," added Folliott, as he again looked back. "Yes, I do though; he has turned into the arable piece, and is cantering along close to the hedge. Now I have lost him. No, there he is again: he has dismounted, and led his horse over the fence. Now he is crossing the meadow. Warm work for a May morning, friend Apwood."

Presently he disappeared from sight altogether,

and as we were now near the common, Folliott's manner became more serious.

"Herbert, I believe you have a quick eye, and I know you have good nerve. The latter is of the most importance—nay, it is all important. By-the-by, have you handled your pistols of late years?"

"Never, since our amicable trials of skill at college, when I was considered rather a decent shot. But it is of no earthly consequence. I shall not try to touch him; I shall fire my pistol in the air."

"Absurd!" cried Folliott. "This will not do at all. Do not you know you are wholly in my hands, and must act as I bid you? Regard yourself simply as a machine, and be guided by me. On no other condition would I be second, even to my dearest friend. Hartley is not to be despised—so be upon your guard. Now listen; you must fire with the speed of lightning, the instant I give the word. Depend upon it you will in that way anticipate his shot. The pistols have, of course, hair triggers. In the hands of a cool-headed man they would hit a pin's head off at twenty paces—they could not help it. But Hartley's head is not cool. If he fires quickly, you will be as safe as

any one else on the ground ; if he hesitates, your shot will knock him over."

I listened in silence, but resolved to keep to my resolution of firing in the air.

Our carriage set us down at the entrance of the lane, and a few minutes' walk brought us to the common. No one had yet arrived, and we sat down on a bank of heather, under the shadow of some tall elms growing in the hedgerow of the field adjoining. The morning was calm, and there was no sound but the twittering of birds, the rustling of the wind through the trees, and the humming of bees amongst the heather. Now and then, however, we heard the tolling of a distant church bell, on the other side of the common ; faint though it was, it struck the ear with melancholy emphasis, and gave a serious direction to our thoughts.

We waited a quarter of an hour beyond the appointed time, but no one came. The common stretched away, silent and solitary, into the misty distance ; patches of gorse and purple heather broke its level monotony. A road—narrow, straight, and overrun with grass—traversed it in a slanting direction. It was along this road that Hartley,

his friend, and the surgeon engaged to attend us, would pass. We were becoming impatient, when a stir amongst the sheep, feeding in the distance where the road first became visible over a small rise of the ground, told us that some one was approaching. We rose hastily—my heart beat somewhat faster, and my throat was dry; but I rejoiced that the suspense would soon be at an end. A light carriage rolled silently and rapidly towards us over the grassy road. The driver, on perceiving us, urged his horses to a gallop. Three men were inside; in another second the carriage reached the spot where we stood. The door was hastily flung open; the men sprang out, and hurried towards us.

Something like a sneer stole over Folliott's face as he exclaimed,—

“ Why, Hartley's not with them ! ”

I stepped forward to meet them. The men approached with uplifted hands, and faces pale with emotion.

“ Where, gentlemen, is your friend ? ” asked Folliott.

They stopped, and simultaneously exclaimed, in a low, fearful whisper,—

“Dead!”

Folliott and myself exchanged glances of horror and remorse. For a moment I leant upon his arm, then, recovering myself, asked eagerly—almost incoherently—for particulars.

There were, as already stated, three men who descended from the carriage. One of these was the surgeon, Mr. Moss, with whom I was well acquainted—the other two were strangers to me; but one, from his stiff, military carriage, and high-dried complexion, I presumed was Colonel Dinder, Hartley’s second, late of the E. I. C. Artillery, and now residing in the neighbourhood. The other was a man of middle age—in fact, his dark hair was already tinged with grey—of a cold, stern, unimpassioned demeanour. His face was partly averted from me, and in that moment of excitement and distress, I only noticed that his features were handsome, but the expression of his countenance gloomy and morose.

Mr. Moss, after shaking me by the hand, shortly stated the case. It was an attack of heart-complaint, so Mr. Moss believed, from his knowledge of Mr. Hartley’s constitution, and from the external symptoms. He had suspected something

amiss about the heart for some months past. There was no occasion for a *post mortem*. That was his private conviction ; but he did not mean to dictate to others.

Here the surgeon glanced at the gentleman standing beside him. The latter made no sign, and Mr. Moss proceeded.

“ Mr. Hartley rose this morning earlier than usual, but on Colonel Dinder’s arrival—the colonel will correct me if I make any mistake—on Colonel Dinder’s arrival, by appointment, it was found that Mr. Hartley had not yet left his dressing-room. On knocking at the door no answer was returned ; the colonel and the servants tried the door, and found it locked. After a further delay, it was thought right to force it open, and the room was entered. The first thing that met their eyes, was Mr. Hartley kneeling, as if in prayer, with a book of devotions open on the chair before him. His head had fallen forwards, and lay upon the book ; at first they thought he was sleeping, but on touching him he did not move ; it was not sleep—but death. The body was lifted to a sofa, and a messenger sent down to the lodge, where I was waiting for Colonel Dinder.

On examining the body, I found it still warm, but life wholly extinct."

He was proceeding to expatiate on the appearance presented by the corpse, but was interrupted by Colonel Dinder, who, in rather a peremptory tone of voice, exclaimed to Folliott,—

"My lord, you will excuse me, but I have not been introduced to your friend; it's the correct thing, my lord, in my humble judgment."

The ceremony was quickly performed: but not content with that, Colonel Dinder, his hat still in his hand, turned to the gentleman by his side, and said:—

"And now, Vaughan, I will introduce you. Mr. Herbert Chauncey—Mr. William Vaughan. Why, Vaughan, what's the matter?—it's the correct thing."

Vaughan's countenance, before so rigidly calm, was now strangely moved. With knit brows, and kindling eyes, he placed his hand on the colonel's arm, and said, in a firm, strong voice—

"Colonel Dinder, I am in no mood for empty ceremonies. Late last night I heard of my poor friend's rash, aye I will add, sinful intention. The letter was brought to me by a special messenger,

for I was fifty miles distant; I started hither instantly, and have travelled post all night. My purpose was to stop the duel, come what might—I arrive, and find my friend a corpse. Inquiry must be instituted—inquiry into the circumstances of the quarrel—inquiry into Mr. Herbert Chauncey's conduct—inquiry into the cause of death. I add nothing more at present: suffice it to say, there must and shall be a strict and rigorous investigation into the whole affair, from beginning to end; and, meantime, I distinctly decline the honour of an introduction to Mr. Herbert Chauncey."

His countenance resumed its natural calmness, and quietly lifting his hat to Lord Folliott and the colonel, Mr. Vaughan retraced his steps to the carriage.

There was an awkward pause: the colonel coughed drily; Folliott coloured with anger; Mr. Moss took a pinch of snuff, and handed his box about. As for myself, after the first twinge of surprise and annoyance, I submitted silently—I might almost say deferentially—to Vaughan's words. For the time, my spirit was crushed and humbled by the awful intelligence of Hartley's decease. The blow had fallen as a warning from

Providence, rebuking the impious presumption of his creatures in wilfully seeking that death, the sentence of which has already gone forth. We walked back, slowly and thoughtfully, to our carriage at the end of the lane.

On parting, something that fell from the surgeon, whilst exchanging a few words with Folliott after I seated myself in the carriage, struck upon my ear, and caused me a pang of anxiety.

I heard him speak of a "heavy fall or blow," and add: "but, my lord, the question is this: —what was the normal condition of the heart?"

My troubles that day were not over. Rosamund received me with a countenance, blanched from anxiety and watching, and eyes red with weeping.

Notwithstanding the shock of Hartley's death, my heart overflowed with thankful joy as I seated myself beside her, and divulged the cause of my agitation on the preceding day, and the danger from which I had been preserved. The moment, however, I mentioned the word "duel," a shudder ran through Rosamund's whole frame, and she sank back upon the sofa almost in a fainting state.

Restoratives revived her, but I did not venture to resume the subject of our conversation.

For a long time she lay motionless, holding my hand in hers. At length, she partly rose, and whispered, faintly:—

“Herbert is it over?—is all well?—is the danger past?”

I assured her that all was well, and begged her to be comforted and to be happy. She turned her eyes languidly upon me, saying,—

“Herbert, I will try to be happy, but I shall never be so happy as I was. You do not love me as I thought you did—nay, be patient: you love me, but not as I love you; you doubt my powers of doing and enduring for your sake. I will try to be happy, but my mind misgives me: the storm may be past, but what if the clouds return after the rain?”

CHAPTER XI.

“CROWNER’S QUEST LAW.”

THE next morning, I had finished dressing, and was gazing out of window, in that dreamy state of enjoyment which so often succeeds a period of painful excitement, comparing my feelings with those experienced only twenty-four hours since, when I perceived an individual walking slowly up the drive towards the front entrance.

He was a stout, little man, shabbily attired in an ancient blue coat with brass buttons, wrinkled gaiters, and a greasy white hat, cocked a little on one side. He stepped along with an air of pert importance, ludicrous to behold, and visibly increasing as he disappeared within the porch below my window, and gave a loud peal to the bell. I could not forbear smiling at the comic grandeur of this unknown visitor, but laughed

outright, when, after a few minutes' delay and a confused sound of angry voices, my conceited friend abruptly emerged from the door with quick, convulsive bound, and agitated coat-tails, implying the application of a strenuous kick to his person from some one behind.

With rueful countenance, and ungraceful speed, he trotted down the drive about thirty or forty yards, and then, wheeling round, paused to take breath. Presently he drew from one pocket a paper, and from the other a constable's staff, and then returned slowly to the attack, waving now the paper, and now the staff, with looks of severe and dignified expostulation, tempered by occasional qualms of apprehension.

I hastened downstairs, and found a group of servants in the porch, loquaciously angry, watching with menacing glances the second approach of my friend. David, usually so serene, appeared to sound the key-note of the chorus of invective that filled the air. I could scarcely obtain an intelligible explanation of what had occurred. At last, David addressed me with suppressed emotion—

“ The poor body yonder, sir, makes believe

to be a constable. Yes, sir ; surely. Makes believe to be a constable, and sauced you shocking, sir ; yes, shocking—said he had a summons to the Crowner's Quest for you, sir, and I don't know what besides."

Here the other servants broke into full cry again, and threw out dark proposals to "heave the rampagious little varmint into the river!"

I once more restored order and tranquillity. Then summoning the ruffled and indignant functionary of the law to the front, endeavoured to ascertain his business. Cautiously eyeing his late aggressors, the constable advanced a few paces, thrust into my hand the paper he had before produced, and then retreated backwards, with the greatest promptitude, to a safe distance. There he stood, staff in hand, watching the effect upon my mind.

The paper ran as follows:—

Meadshire } "WHEREAS, I am credibly informed that
 to wit. } you can give evidence touching the
death of James Hartley, now lying dead in the
parish of Downend in the said county; these are,
therefore, in his Majesty's name, to charge and
command you personally to be and appear at the

public-house, known by the name of the ‘Druid’s Head,’ in the said parish, at eleven o’clock in the forenoon, then and there to give evidence, and be examined on his Majesty’s behalf,” &c. &c. &c.

In short, it was a summons, duly signed “Ralph Crawdle, Coroner,” directing me to appear and give evidence at the inquest to be held on poor Hartley.

Making light of the matter, was of course the right line to take; and, after glancing at the document again, I tore it up with a careless smile, and giving the constable some loose silver, by way of compensation for the rough reception he had met with, dismissed him, as I thought, happy and contented.

That there should be any inquest at all was bad enough, but that I should be summoned to it seemed perfectly monstrous. Some mischievous person must be egging the coroner on. I found, too, that the foolish little constable had made impudent allusions to homicide and manslaughter in his interview with my servants.

Laughably absurd, no doubt—but still unpleasant. I was as yet little known in the neighbourhood. Even my own tenants, through an

unfortunate conjuncture, were not, as before explained, on the best of terms with me. The inquest was to be held the next day. Folliott, my only intimate friend in the neighbourhood, had that very morning run up to town for a few days. Rosamund was still far from well, and needed perfect rest and quiet. There was, however, no help for it; I must obey the summons.

I mounted my horse next morning, and, followed by my groom, rode to the “Druid’s Head,”—the village inn—where the inquest was to be held. It was about an hour’s ride from Glenarvon, near the lodge gate of the park of Mount Maurice. The “Druid’s Head” was a dilapidated old building, that seemed to have been flung carelessly from a distance, and to have been crushed and huddled together by the violence of the fall. The gables stood awry; the dormer-windows cropped up from the misshapen, weather-beaten roof, at unexpected places; the chimney-stack appeared nodding to its fall—an illusion favoured by the wall-flowers in the joints of the stone-work waving to and fro in the wind; here a bow-window was thrust into the road, as if particularly solicitous of attention; there a quaint, narrow lattice was

squeezed into a recess ; and the cracks in the wall, on either side, seemed to imply that the effort had nearly squeezed out the window altogether.

To this building the coroner's jury, having viewed the body of Hartley, had repaired to hear evidence and decide on a verdict.

A group of villagers—men, women, and children—were gathered round the tumble-down porch of the inn, talking, or I might say jabbering, in their provincial dialect with unusual animation. Most of them lived on the estate, which accounted for the interest they took in the proceedings.

On dismounting, I approached the porch and attempted to enter. The country people of the neighbourhood were mostly civil, though uncouth. I was, therefore, surprised at the surly carelessness with which some of the men met my quiet efforts to pass. My groom ran forward to assist me. Perhaps he was over-zealous in his exertions, but there was a murmur of indignation all round, and exclamations of—"Aye, aye, let un pass—let un pass. He be anxious to get his vardict!"

"Have a care, lads ; he be a comical chap,

he be. Blessed if he mayn't lay some on us alongside of the poor squire yonder!"

I had ridden hard, and entered flushed with the exercise, as well as with the annoyance caused by these remarks.

There was a slight stir in the room, and all eyes were turned upon me, as I sat down on a chair handed to me by one of the more civil of the bystanders.

The scene was depressing. A row of dull-witted rustics, with two or three of the better class, were seated on a couple of rickety benches, in a long, low-roofed, dimly-lighted room, with sanded floor, and worm-eaten deal table. The walls were adorned with a series of hunting sketches, interspersed with a few hideous religious prints. The chimney-piece bristled with long, white, clay tobacco-pipes; whilst, on a side-board at the end of the room, stood the everlasting punch-bowl, with rows of many shaped wine-glasses in close column. The air was heavy with the smell of stale tobacco, beer, and cider. The night before, no doubt, the same men were sitting here boozing over their liquor, and bawling vulgar songs. To-day they were discussing the

solemn question how their landlord came by his untimely end.

To add to my discomfort, I noticed amongst the jurymen my former steward, Malpus. He sat apparently absorbed in a train of pious reflections, with the whites of his eyes turned up, and his wrinkled hands placed in patriarchal fashion on the head of his oaken staff. His presence was a feature in the scene especially offensive to me.

I felt the delicacy of my position, and was aware that my examination, however uncalled for, could scarcely be other than trying to my feelings. But I was totally unprepared for the extraordinary treatment in store for me.

The coroner, Mr. Ralph Crawdle, was a large, fat man. He had once been a druggist, but having, by a stroke of good luck in a mining speculation, obtained an accession of fortune, he abandoned business, contrived to pass an examination, and obtained a surgeon's diploma. He had not long practised, when a second speculation in coal mines, in which he was fond of dabbling, shipwrecked his newly-made fortune, and left him poorer than ever. "Poor Crawdle's case" was taken up warmly by a few busy friends, and a

vacancy in the office of coroner for that part of the county occurring, a push was made in his favour, which resulted in his being elected.

No sooner, however, was he safely installed, than some of the better class of gentry regretted it. Crawdle not only continued to speculate in mining and other shares, but courted the applause of the vulgar, by affecting heartfelt sympathy with the wrongs of the lower classes, and a lofty indignation against the wealthy and powerful, only held in check by a wholesome fear lest his fees should be disallowed by the magistrates at quarter sessions.

Mr. Crawdle sat at the end of the table, with pen and ink before him; near him was William Vaughan, stolid and calm, but deeply interested in the progress of the inquiry, and occasionally obtruding officious suggestions to the coroner. A few gentlemen from the neighbourhood—mostly magistrates—occupied chairs behind. Round the door thronged a considerable number of farmers, and other country folk, some of whom appeared, even at that early hour of the day, a little the worse for liquor.

It seemed that the surgeon had given his

opinion to Hartley's friends, that disease of the heart was the cause of death, but dissatisfied with that opinion, and drawing unwarranted conclusions from a slight wound or bruise on Hartley's temples, they had exerted themselves with absurd and mischievous zeal to obtain an inquest on the body, and had unfortunately succeeded. Crawdle liked popularity, and loved his fees.

The surgeon, Mr. Moss, at the moment I entered, was undergoing a rigid examination. He firmly adhered to his opinion that extraneous causes might possibly have accelerated, but could in no case have directly produced, the attack of which Hartley died.

Crawdle interrupted him with lofty impatience.

"Mr. Moss, have the goodness to recollect yourself. Do you venture to stake your professional reputation upon that opinion? Do you wish it to go forth to the county that, in your judgment, it was impossible—physically impossible—for the deceased to have escaped a fatal heart attack—I avoid technical terms in order that the gentlemen of the jury may thoroughly understand me—if Mr. Herbert Chauncey had not laid violent hands on him? Sir, if that's your

opinion, I must, with all due respect, inform you, I wouldn't call you in even to dose a pauper!"

Mr. Moss, exceedingly indignant, proceeded to re-argue the case, and drew the coroner's attention to the *post-mortem* examination of the body. There had been disease of the heart of some standing.

"Very well, sir,"—rejoined Crawdle, tapping a fat fore-finger on the edge of the table at each word he uttered,—“very well, sir; your position, if I understand it, is this. That you, or any one else, may evoke a disorder latent in my body, by any means you or any one else may think proper, and bring me to an untimely grave, with impunity—with perfect impunity—for your own pleasure or convenience? John Noakes is threatened with blindness in the right eye. Says William Stokes, ‘Noakes,’ says he, ‘you’ve a predisposition to blindness; hold a moment—I’ll put you out of suspense!’ Whereupon Stokes knocks out Noakes’s eye with a poker. Now do you pretend to say, that Noakes would have no remedy in a civil court for the damage, as well as in a criminal court for the assault? Sir, the gentlemen of the jury—and a more intelligent set

of men never sat on that bench—know a great deal better!"

The intelligent gentlemen of the jury grinned broadly in approbation of their coroner. Mr. Moss, put out of countenance, and out of temper, diverged from the medical to the legal aspect of the question; whereupon Crawdle abruptly dismissed him with,—

"Thank you, sir—thank you. Your physic's bad enough, we don't want your law into the bargain! You may go, sir."

My turn came next. The coroner, although he knew me by sight, shouted my name at the pitch of his voice, and affected to be surprised when he found I was sitting within a few feet of his table. Then, clearing his throat, he addressed me much in the same strain as a magistrate cautions an accused prisoner not to say anything to criminate himself. He remarked that he was only doing his duty in informing me that I was not bound to give evidence, if that evidence appeared in my judgment calculated to expose me to criminal proceedings. He was sorry I had not brought my legal adviser with me. From information he had received, he had felt it incum-

bent on him to summon me, but he should on no account examine me until after all the other witnesses. It was very possible it would be his duty not to take my evidence at all.

Eager to make a plain statement, I insisted on tendering my evidence. The coroner, after some hesitation, assented. It soon, however, became manifest that Vaughan, or some other malicious enemy, had set both coroner and jury against me. I was frequently interrupted; I was cautioned by one of the jury that I was on my oath; I was asked by the coroner whether, when I had hold of the deceased by the throat, he did not turn black in the face. Then Malpus, affecting to speak in a voice husky with emotion, respectfully put a question:—

“ May I be permitted to ask you, Squire Chauncey, if you kicked the deceased as he lay on the ground?—accidentally, I mean—accidentally, of course. I know Squire Chauncey comes of too good a stock to act amiss of purpose. Aye, aye, and his mother was a pious woman, too—aye, she was. May I be permitted to ask you that question, Squire Chauncey? ”

Here another juror—with a face red and shining,

as if it had been partially roasted, and then basted with oil—leant forwards, and, pointing with his elbow at me, said to the coroner,—

“ Mr. Cor’ner, by’r leave, I’ll chastise thic Squire Chauncey a bit, I wull.”

I could not stand this, and rose, in a great rage, to remonstrate; but a gentleman near me good-naturedly explained that, in the dialect of the neighbourhood, “chastise” only meant to “question” sharply. I was not much pacified by this explanation, especially as I found the man wished to ask me whether “it warn’t a fact that I’d hindered the sarvants from picking up their maister arter I’d knocked un down?”

A dozen other impertinent questions were launched at me—now by the coroner, now by one or other of the jury—of a suggestive character, likely, even when satisfactorily answered, to leave a sting behind, and imbue those present with a strong suspicion that, whatever might be the law of the case, I was nothing more nor less than a heartless, blood-stained bully! Ever and anon the coroner would officiously caution me, as if from a kind motive, that my words would be taken down in writing; whilst Malpus would

shake his head, and move his lips with a solemn expression of countenance, as if giving vent to some pious ejaculation. On the whole I kept my temper well: I gave the poor people “rope” enough, and allowed them to pester me as much as they would, hoping that the more fully the matter was canvassed, the more completely would these ridiculous slanders be disproved.

The next witnesses were some of Hartley’s servants. They knew little or nothing of the encounter between their master and myself. They had heard what they termed “a bustle.” The coroner encouraged them to be communicative. Putting down his pen, he adopted a familiar, homely manner, exclaiming,—

“Now here I am; quite a stranger I may say—quite a stranger. I want help—I want information. Can any one throw a little light on this most painful subject? This is one of those occasions when every Englishman should speak out! Come now.”

Thus urged, the witnesses began to be more loquacious. One dwelt with pathos upon the bruise on their master’s forehead. Another had noticed that “master” was much excited after

I had left. Another said that "master's" countenance and manner were greatly changed, and that "his own born mother wouldn't ha' known 'im."

I now asked that the surgeon should be recalled, and elicited from him, by a few questions, the fact that he had attended Hartley more than once in attacks of illness, which he was satisfied arose from the same cause as that last and fatal seizure, and might if neglected have carried him off. The servants themselves admitted that their master had occasionally complained of sensations more or less symptomatic of the same complaint.

The coroner conversed with Vaughan, in a loud whisper, whilst I was questioning the witnesses; and showed by his manner that he held very cheap every word I uttered, and every word said in reply.

He now, after blowing his nose loudly, commenced charging the gentlemen of the jury. Very prosy and elaborate he was, both on legal and medical points, and dark were the insinuations thrown out against myself, as well as against the surgeon. The majority of the jury sat with mouths and eyes expanded, completely bewildered,

and utterly at a loss what sort of verdict to return.

Before the coroner sat down, he artfully made an ostentatious apology to me for the rigour with which he had felt it his duty to examine me: as an honest man he had no alternative. True, I was a gentleman of rank and fortune, but whether a wealthy gentleman or a humble peasant, Mr. Crawdle would deal out the same measure of severity to both. He clinched this fine sentiment by a homely proverb,—“What was sauce for the goose, was sauce for the gander.” He affected to thank me for my candid admissions that morning; but I must bear in mind that candour could have nothing to do with the question of guilty or not guilty. It only affected the question of how much or how little punishment. He was certainly pleased to see that I was in a better frame of mind than when the summons was left by the constable at my house.

I fell into the trap, and, with some sternness of manner, asked him what he meant. Crawdle gave me a wink, intended for all the room to see, as if cautioning me to be silent. I angrily persisted in questioning him, and he then, with an

air of reluctance, gave a most exaggerated picture of the treatment of the constable by my servants the day before; how he had been kicked down the drive whilst I stood smiling at a window, and I know not what besides.

I explained at once, and remonstrated with the coroner that he should have noticed so trumpery a matter at such a moment. He shrugged his ample shoulders, exclaiming,—

“Sir, you forced it upon me. As for the officer, he is a man of trust; his story you admit to be founded in fact. He complained of inability to sit down in consequence of the kicks inflicted on him. Call the officer in.”

He was nowhere to be found, and I concluded that Vaughan had smuggled him away, lest the jury should hear the real truth. I offered to bring forward my groom as a witness of the whole occurrence. But Crawdle hastily growled,—

“We believe you, sir, we believe you. You are not accused of any offence here, sir. All you have said may have to be repeated in another court; we do not take cognizance of assaults here, sir. This is only a court of inquiry, sir.”

Then, turning to the jury, he wound up his

observations by instructing them what conclusion to come to. Since, however, he pointed out three different verdicts that a jury, similarly situated, might feel it their duty to return, and appeared to give them their choice of any one of them; it was not surprising that, for a considerable time, they could not agree upon a verdict at all.

Absurd as it may seem, the jury at first found a verdict of manslaughter.

Now, although the grand jury would have kicked out a bill of indictment, the fact of such a verdict having been found would have been a serious misfortune.

The foreman disclaimed having any hand in the verdict. It was written with no little difficulty by one of the jury, who professed to be a "scholard." Two-thirds of them could not sign their names—a proportion that tallies with a parliamentary return I have seen on this subject—and, considering all things, the verdict of manslaughter was by no means astonishing.

Crawdle, however, did not quite like it. He held the paper on which it was written up to the light, wiped his forehead lazily, looked hard in everybody's face, expectorated on his handkerchief,

and then suggested a modification, simply reducing the verdict to this, that Hartley died of "disease of the heart."

The moment the terms of the verdict were settled by the coroner and the jury, I hastily advanced to the table, and commented, with some warmth, on the childishness of the proceedings, and the wanton annoyance inflicted on me for no useful purpose whatever. The farmers and common people present heard what I said with sulky impatience. The few of the better class looked confused and uncomfortable, but did not give me any support. Vaughan put on his hat, and walked out. Colonel Dinder, indeed—who had been calmly dozing during most of the inquest in a large arm-chair by the fireside, under the impression, I believe, that his chilly limbs derived some faint warmth from the coloured shavings piled in the grate—Colonel Dinder woke up, as he heard my voice raised to a louder pitch than usual, and got on his legs—when I paused—exclaiming, that Mr. Herbert Chauncey had acted throughout with "perfect propriety." Mr. Herbert Chauncey was a "man of honour." Mr. Herbert Chauncey was on the ground "to the

minute." As an officer, who had seen some little service against the Pindarrees, and in the Burmese war, he felt it his duty to say "my conduct had been correct—perfectly correct from first to last."

This mode of coming to my aid did not altogether suit my purpose, and therefore, with a slight bow to the colonel, and the other gentry present, I pushed out of the room, and groping my way along the narrow passage to the entrance of the inn, found my groom and horses waiting for me.

The crowd outside had increased, and I was no sooner mounted than a discordant yell greeted my ears from all sides. My groom spurred his horse forward to clear the road, but received a blow from a hay-rake, which made him reel in his saddle. His horse, however, broke through the crowd, and I followed, pelted as I went by mud and stones. As soon as we were clear of the mob we put spurs to our horses, and galloped homeward without further ceremony.

On reaching Glenarvon, I was glad to hear that Rosamund had felt well enough to take a drive in the carriage. In the hall, two gentlemen were waiting to see me, and, after changing my clothes,

and taking a little refreshment, I went to meet them, and found Apwood and my steward, Maxwell.

It appeared that Apwood, whilst riding by that morning, had detected a countryman concealed in my rickyard. The rickyard was full of wheat and barley, with a mow or two of hay. Maxwell, as before stated, amongst other annoyances, had been troubled by threatening letters, signed "Swing," written in a scrawling, illiterate hand. There was every reason to suspect that the countryman, who was a stranger in these parts, intended to fire the wheat-mows. However, no lucifer-matches nor tinder-box were in his pocket, and the Glenarvon constable, who, after the manner of village constables, had been coaxing him to confess he was guilty ever since he was given in charge, had failed to elicit anything decisive. It appeared, therefore, to be a case of simple vagrancy, and, anxious to get rid of the man, I remanded him to next petty sessions.

Maxwell was in some distress of mind : he took me aside, whilst Apwood was drinking home-brewed ale at the luncheon-table, and confessed that the constant strain and anxiety of mind he

had suffered ever since he had acted as my steward, was becoming too much for him ; his wife's health, too, was failing. He had striven to promote my interests, but, to speak candidly, he would not pass such another six months as he had passed since Christmas for double the salary I allowed him, liberal as it was. He was a Scotchman, he added, and knew the value of money, but must reluctantly ask me to look out for another steward.

I could scarcely blame him ; he had had a troublesome time of it. So, after some more conversation, he took his leave, with the understanding that we were to part. Apwood remained behind, having some private business to discuss with me.

We retired into the library, where, taking from his breast-pocket a thin folio volume, rolled up and tied with a string, he placed it on the table, and said :—

“I fear you will think me a little bold, sir, after so short an acquaintance, but politics draw men of all ranks together, and I have ventured to call on you to offer my services at the forthcoming election. I have here,” he added, hastily

unfastening the book, and spreading it open before me, “a printed copy of the poll-book of the last election, and a very valuable document it is I assure you. Now I have been carefully running over the names, and am as confident as I am that I stand here, that, if you make a bold push at once, and issue an address in anticipation of a contest, you will carry two-thirds of the constituency with you, and win in a canter ; in fact, there's nobody to oppose you ; the Whigs are ‘all in the downs.’ There's not the ghost of a chance for any colour but true blue ! ”

My first impulse was simply to thank him for his good wishes and change the subject ; but the man had been civil to me. He had behaved well in the matter of the lifehold property. He had been friendly and civil to poor Maxwell. That very morning he had given a new proof of his vigilance and good-will, by promptly apprehending the fellow hiding in the rickyard, and bringing him before me on his own responsibility. Folliott said he was a warm political supporter of mine amongst the farmers ; I might as well open a little of my mind to him.

“Mr. Apwood,” I said, “circumstances have,

I fear, placed it entirely out of my power to stand for the county, at all events on the present occasion. You have perhaps heard only a garbled story of what has lately occurred, and as you have some claim upon my confidence, and may be able to counteract any false reports current amongst gentry and farmers, I will give you the true version."

Apwood listened with respectful attention. I then briefly described the unfortunate rencontre with Hartley, his violent conduct, arising from causes on which it was unnecessary to touch, the intended duel, Hartley's awfully sudden death, and finally, the preposterous inquest at the "Druid's Head" that day.

His astonishment was extreme: bending over the library table, with his head in his hands, he appeared plunged in perplexity. After a time he sprang up, and exclaimed—

"Here's some vile plot afoot, Mr. Chauncey, you may depend! I mistrust that fellow with the iron-grey complexion, William Vaughan; he's a double-dyed Radical, and no mistake. 'Tis an awkward affair no doubt, yet, by drawing back from the contest, you seem, excuse me for saying

so, to show the white feather, and knock under to your opponents. Seems to me, you ought to show a bold front, and hold your own. Crush scandal fearlessly, as you would a nettle, and it don't sting. Of course, sir, you know best; but for my part, I wouldn't care a button for what the folk say. Hoist the blue flag—issue your address; who'll care for a trumpery quarrel like this? At all events, let me implore you, my dear sir, not to decide in a hurry. Wait a bit, and meantime I'll be quietly working among the freeholders in your favour."

"Well, I am resolved on one thing; I shall call Mr. Coroner to a strict account for his conduct towards me, and for the gross irregularity of the inquest."

Apwood, however, loudly advocated my leaving him alone. "The inquest will be only a nine days' wonder—let it blow over. Then clear decks for action, and go ahead, with three cheers for true blue!"

At the moment, his enthusiasm fell rather flat; I was tired, jaded, and ill at ease. However, I thanked him for his good wishes, promising to give the matter consideration, and so we parted.

CHAPTER XII.

A ZEALOUS STEWARD.

SOME weeks glided away, and, as Apwood had foretold, the affair of the inquest appeared to prove but a “nine days’ wonder.” Of course people talked, but by and by were tired of it. The majority, as is often the case, contented themselves by taking for granted that probably Hartley and myself were both in the wrong. Meantime I was beginning once more to enjoy Glenarvon. Rosamund had quite recovered from her agitation and anxiety of mind. I could not, however, fail to notice that her spirits were not so thoroughly joyous as before my quarrel with Hartley. She was tenderly affectionate—she was apparently happy—but her happiness was more subdued. As for myself I was beginning to take increasing interest in a country life. Apwood

was the cause of this. As soon as Maxwell had taken his departure I sounded him whether he would undertake the management of my property. Apwood asked for a week's time to consider the matter, but finally consented. I had every reason to congratulate myself on the choice I had made.

My new steward was indefatigable in his endeavours to serve me. He contrived, in the first place, to make peace between me and my tenants. At his suggestion I invited them to a dinner in a large tent on the lawn. The beef and plum-pudding, the beer, cider, and punch, effaced every shade of annoyance in their minds. My health was drunk with deafening shouts of applause, and the band from Stoke-upon-Avon played "The fine old English gentleman" with energetic pathos. I was under thirty, but that did not signify.

In the course of the evening Rosamund ventured on the scene for a few minutes, and amidst the uncouth clamour and rough faces of the farmers, appeared like a beautiful being from some other world. Her appearance drove them almost wild. They yelled, they shouted, they clapped

their hands. Three cheers for Madam Chauncey, with three times three, reverberated through the tent. Then came half-a-dozen cheers, instigated by sentiments from various adventurous individuals, such as—"The squire's lady,—God bless her!" "Madam Chauncey, and long life to her!" "As you like her, gentlemen! as you like her!" The band outside played the appropriate tune of "The girls we left behind us," and, amidst the hubbub, Rosamund retired, waving her handkerchief with all due emphasis.

There was some speechifying. I returned thanks for the honour done to my wife and myself, and, touching lightly upon past misunderstandings, spoke hopefully of the future, praised my new steward, and promised to do all that a good landlord ought to do; then sat down amidst a whirlwind of applause.

Apwood also spoke, and every word he said went home to the farmers, for he understood them well. "Live and let live," was a phrase he used more than once, but each time with more decisive effect. The cheers were deafening. Finally, the company subsided into tobacco-smoke and comic songs, and I then bade them good-night, leaving

Apwood to take my place at the head of the table.

It was late before we got to sleep that night. The band collapsed pretty soon, and changed their instruments for knives and forks and mugs of ale ; but the comic songs went on till midnight. I think I heard “The twopenny postman, Walker,” seven times, muffled and faint by distance, but still distinct enough. The owls answered from the neighbouring wood, “making night hideous.” However, towards morning the singing became sentimental, and after that, the guests began to take their departure, some on horseback, some on foot, roaring snatches of incoherent songs more and more faintly until lost in the distance, and leaving Glenarvon and its weary inmates once more in peace.

But Apwood’s services, as manager of my property, did not consist in merely making things pleasant between the tenantry and myself. He looked after my interests with a keen eye. The farmers had fair play, but Apwood took care that I should have fair play, too ; and the farmers seemed to like him the better for it. They nudged each other in the ribs at market, and winked

over their morning draughts of cider, exclaiming, with a chuckle—"Thic Maister Apwood be up to a thing or two, he be!"

He entered warmly into my plans for improving the estate. I had inherited a share in an iron-mine in an adjoining county, and here his assistance was invaluable. He found the other proprietors were little better than sleeping partners, and had left everything in the hands of an agent,—honest enough, but slow and timid. Apwood roused up the agent, threw on more hands, introduced a simple piece of machinery for running the ore up a steep incline to the tram-road above, and increased our profits ten per cent.

Rosamund, apt to let first impressions affect her mind too seriously, was a long time getting over her dislike to him. However, he made himself so useful in the gardens that she was at last won over.

It was mentioned in a former chapter, that Rosamund's maid, Louise, was going to leave us. I inquired everywhere for a lady's-maid to fill her place. We were so fortunate as to find one before Louise quitted us. Winifred Jones came to us with first-rate recommendations, having left an

excellent place from a wish to live in the country, an unusual *penchant* for women in her sphere of life: but one we were not disposed to criticise. Louise knew her, and seemed confident she would exactly suit her young mistress. Winifred was a handsome girl, rather like a gipsy, but singularly attentive and zealous. Rosamund was in a short time almost reconciled to the loss of Louise.

To return now to matters of more interest. I had ceased to think of Parliament. Friends might mention the subject, but I did not encourage them. An election, however, was now imminent, for Hazlebury had finally determined to retire.

One morning, the servant summoned me from one of the flower-terraces where I was sauntering book in hand, to receive some visitors who had just arrived—Mr. Ferris and the Miss Ferrises. Rosamund was somewhere in the garden, but could not at the moment be found. With something like a groan I obeyed the summons. Mr. Ferris was a cousin of mine; he was more nearly related, so the learned said, to Jeffry Ferris than I was myself—now, as Jeffry had selected me for

his heir, the Ferrises at first felt it their painful duty to regard me as a malignant enemy, and carefully avoid coming near me. It seemed, however, that they had begun to think better of this. I am afraid we were rather sorry for their change of politics. Mr. Ferris was a chattering busybody. One comfort was, that he was rather ill-natured. Your real bores are amiable; you feel compunctions of conscience in treating them as bores. Now I felt justified in calling my cousin a bore behind his back, and politely treating him as such to his face. His daughters were very dissimilar one to another. The eldest was rather like her father—mind and person. The youngest, though gaunt and pale, was not ill-looking, and had a turn for the romantic. The family lived about ten miles off, in a spot that some would term gloomy—some picturesque. It was on the north side of a steep hill, clothed with fir plantations. At the foot of the hill was a lake, shallow and rushy—a weeping willow or two ornamented the shore, and occasionally a couple of sickly swans, who evidently did not find the climate agree with them, floated on the inky water, with a dejected expression of countenance. The country

round for half a mile was swampy ; the fir plantation had been suspected of harbouring two notorious burglars, and was said to be haunted by the ghost of an old man in a white great-coat, carrying a pitchfork on his shoulder.

Here, in a square, compact house, built, by way of giving cheerfulness to the scene, in the style of a cockney villa near London, resided my cousin Ferris, a widower, with his two daughters. He was a banker, and had had a life and death struggle in the recent crash, when half the west-country banks went to the wall, but had weathered the storm somehow or other, and was supposed to be doing well. Every day but Sunday, with few exceptions, Mr. Ferris drove into Stoke-upon-Avon, in his yellow gig, with a yellow silk handkerchief tied round the lower part of his yellowish-brown face, and a groom, in drab and yellow livery, by his side ; looking, as he drove along the road, like the very genius of jaundice going its rounds in search of victims.

To-day he had taken a holiday, to give “the girls,”—one would never see thirty again, the other was only three years short of it,—“a bit of a lark.” As I entered at one door of the hall, Rosamund

entered at the other, and the moment we had gone through the ceremony of greeting, Ferris, with an extraordinary air of mystery, and an elaborate contortion of the face, drew me by the sleeve into the recess of the oriel window. He had a busy, restless countenance, a yellowish complexion, as before observed, and a pair of flexible eyebrows. No sooner was I safe in the recess, than he began, in a hoarse whisper, audible at the other end of the room, to congratulate me on “my triumphant escape from the clutches of the law at the late abominable inquest.”

Now, as I knew that the inquest at the “Druid’s Head” was a subject very painful to my dear Rosamund, I was alarmed lest she should overhear him.

Fortunately, however, the two Miss Ferrises were both talking to her at once, and her attention was fully occupied.

Ferris went on, with an improved grimace, and a jerk of the whole body.

“Cousin Herbert, I should have made it a point—made it a point to have run over to console with you, but have been suffering from a

cold—a nasty cold ; caught by fishing in our lake, after a warm day's work in the ' Stoke-upon-Avon and National and Provincial Bank.' Isabella, my youngest, declares 'twas from sleeping with my bedroom windows closed, thereby producing a morbid susceptibility of the pores of the skin. But then, you know, she cannot abide anything to be said against her lake—her beloved lake. I call her 'the lady of the lake,' ha ! ha ! But really, I beg to assure you of my full sympathy in your late unhappy disaster."

"Really, Mr. Ferris, I am not aware of having met with any disaster at all."

"True, true ; it would have been worse if you had been shot yourself ! True, true ! "

"I do not understand you. There was no duel, and no one was shot. Shall we join the ladies ? "

"No duel ? No one shot ? " And he gave a little jump in the air with amazement. "I was told the ball passed through his brain ! Very uncomfortable for both parties—very ! "

I doubt not he was quite aware of the real facts, but I thought it right to tell him what had really happened.

"Aye, aye; this is well—very well," he rejoined; "I am glad it was only a scuffle, and not a duel. You see parties had begun to whisper strange tales about. Some said Hartley wanted to get you out of the way to make sure of his election. Some said 'twas *vice versa*. Monstrous, monstrous; nay, quite unchristian to spread such tales."

"I am glad you think so, sir. Will you oblige me by giving up the name of your informant?"

"I! cousin Chauncey—I! I know nothing! My memory, sir, my memory, sir, is not what it was!" and he gave a shrill and querulous sigh, like the mew of a cat. "However," he added, "I'm rejoiced that you weathered the inquest so well."

I could not endure this any longer, and begging him not to allude any further to a stupid affair that I wished to be forgotten, I led him away to where the ladies were seated.

"My dear," Miss Isabella was saying, "a person with imagination may take more liberties than others. We are a privileged race; are we not, Mrs. Chauncey?"

"I do not pretend to be one of the race, I assure you."

"Oh, Mrs. Chauncey, you cannot deceive me! It is written in every line of your countenance. Oh, yes, you are one of us—you are one of us."

"Take care," interposed the elder sister; "take care, or Isabella will inveigle you into a midnight walk, on the shores of our lake, to listen to the frogs. She was there last night, and if she does not take care will meet with a watery grave."

"A delicious death!" sighed Isabella.

"Delicious—what, drowning? Have you ever made the experiment?"

"A sweet, dreamy sensation; a heavy throng of fancies gushing over the brain; all one's past life clustered before the mind's eye in kaleidoscope distinctness: then a vague delirium, a poetic bewilderment, and all is over."

"Herbert," said Rosamund, "you were once nearly drowned. What were your feelings?"

"Excessive fright, and a sense of suffocation."

"Isabel thinks the Humane Society's men on the banks of the Serpentine should be pro-

secuted for cruelty to animals," remarked Miss Ferris.

"Oh, 'tis the imagination!" murmured Isabella, burying her nose in a bouquet of flowers Rosamund had just given her.

"Really," exclaimed her sister, "you are as mad as poor Mr. Hartley was said to be."

"Hush!" interposed their father, in a loud whisper, and with a considerate glance at Rosamund and myself. Then, with an air of great tact, he changed the subject. "Talking of madness, they say Sir Hugh Littlecot, of Severn Banks, is very queer in his head; he has been about this neighbourhood two or three times of late, so the turnpike-men have told me, but always driving at a furious pace, as if—saving your presence, Mrs. Chauncey—some one unpleasant were close at his heels. The last time I saw him was on the 15th April. He was looking ill—very ill. Ah, he was always morose. Now, Miss Littlecot, she's quite another thing—soft and gentle. Ah, well, d'ye think it will rain to-morrow?"

This abrupt change of the subject arose from his at length perceiving that I was exceedingly

annoyed by the remarks he was making. Rosamund did not see my face. I therefore took no pains to look otherwise than worried and vexed at my cousin's mischievous chat.

There was an awkward pause, when a brilliant thought struck me that I would put them down to the piano. They were all musical. The father was great on the flute—the daughters on the piano. Soon the two ladies were absorbed in an overture to a new German opera, that shook my ancestors on the wall, and bewildered the bass pedal. Ferris stood by, now holding his hands as if he was fingering his flute, now folding his arms and rocking to and fro, like a landsman on board ship in a gale of wind, and now uttering a nasal snort of approbation. Rosamund stood near, with a slight smile trembling on her lips.

At that moment the hall door was flung open, and in walked, first, a huge Newfoundland dog, who marched up to Rosamund, with whom he was a great favourite; secondly, Folliott, his master, with a look of profound discomfort at this tumult of sweet sounds; and lastly, Apwood.

Folliott bowed expressively to Rosamund, and sank into an Elizabethan arm-chair, at the farthest end of the room.

Apwood said—“Hush, we will not disturb the music,” and beckoned me aside.

The German overture meantime eddied noisily round the room, and Ferris, and his fair offspring, continued abstracted from the visible world.

Apwood’s countenance wore an expression of triumph, and, looking straight at me, as if he expected to communicate his own sensations to myself, he exclaimed :—

“ Hazlebury has applied for the Chiltern Hundreds. There will be an election for the county in six weeks ! ”

A very slight thrill of excitement passed through me. But no. It was nothing to me now. I had resolved not to stand. Smiling, carelessly, I answered :—

“ With all my heart.”

“ Aye, but look here,” persisted Apwood, drawing from his pocket a large sheet of paper, damp from the press, covered with thick, staring letters, and a profusion of capitals. “ Read ! ” he said, “ Read ! ”

It was an address to the honest, free, and independent electors of the County of Meadshire, by William Vaughan, offering himself as a candidate for their suffrages at the approaching election. He affected to be influenced by two reasons—first, that he was solicited to come forwards by a large number of freeholders; secondly, that no other eligible landowner, or man of character, was likely to offer himself. A great part of Vaughan's address was an energetic funeral oration on his deceased friend, James Hartley, Esq., who had fully intended to solicit their suffrages, and whose sudden and mysterious death, at so critical a moment, had filled every honest man's bosom with regret and consternation. He would not dwell at any length on that painful circumstance; it must still be fresh in their recollection. He respectfully suggested that the best mode of expressing their high opinion of the deceased, and giving vent to their feelings, would be to give a favourable hearing to his dear and intimate friend, unworthy though he was to be selected as a substitute. He professed himself an advocate of the rights of the people, an enemy of aristocratic corruption and one-sided

legislation, and a friend of the working classes—in short, a benevolent democrat.

The address had been evidently drawn up in full expectation of my starting as a candidate. I saw the artfulness of alluding to Hartley's death, and could not now doubt but that my summons to the inquest, that irrational and inexcusable step, was a stroke of policy intended to damage my character amongst the electors, and weaken my position in the county. I had been the victim of a base conspiracy, concocted with low cunning, and carried out with unblushing audacity. Angry disgust seized me. I turned to Apwood, who stood waiting to see the effect of the address, and exclaimed,—

“Apwood, I shall oppose this fellow !”

“I thought you would not hesitate after such an insult as that!” he rejoined.

“I will not be either tricked or bullied into tame submission. I will show these scoundrels what I am made of. Make all necessary preparations — retain lawyers, appoint canvassers, scour the county, fling money about freely, strain every nerve, print addresses, circulate hand-bills, post up placards—mortgage my estates, if neces-

sary—raise funds by every means in your power. I give you *carte blanche*; Vaughan has thoroughly roused me, and he shall find I am no weak, no idle opponent!"

"Well said, Herbert!" exclaimed Folliott, who had joined us. "I am glad you have got the steam up. We shall have some fun now; let us go to work at once! There's cousin Ferris yonder; he has a good batch of votes." And Folliott was moving towards him, when Apwood stopped him with,—

"Gently, gently, my lord; we must get our party together first. That old gentleman is as treacherous as he is talkative. Ten to one he would either join the enemy at once, which would be bad enough, or affect to be one of Mr. Chauncey's chief supporters, which would be still worse!"

Folliott at once acquiesced, and retreated precipitately to his arm-chair, until the music was over, and our friends fairly out of the house.

We then took counsel together. There must be a meeting of the Tory gentry, and a resolution proposed and carried in my favour; that was the first step. Apwood and Folliott rode off in

different directions to make arrangements, and Rosamund and myself sat down to study the poll-book of the last election, lent us by Apwood.

In a week, we were plunged headforemost into the bustle and excitement of a county election.

CHAPTER XIII.

CANVASSING THE COUNTY.

My unfortunate *fracas* with Hartley, the challenge, the sudden death, the inquest, were certainly matters injurious to my prospects as a candidate. In the towns, and even in the agricultural district immediately surrounding Mount Maurice, the poorer class of voters opposed me as one man. My friends and supporters were hooted, hustled, and pelted, whenever they showed themselves in Downend, and, indeed, in adjoining parishes. A swarm of libellous squibs, placards, and pamphlets, issued from the Radical press.

But I was the only Tory candidate in the field, and this was in my favour. Again, Vaughan was an iron manufacturer; he had made, and was making, money by trade, and therefore was regarded in those days as an objectionable person.

My politics were of the right sort—his were sternly Radical. Whatever my personal antecedents, it was, in the judgment of the county gentlemen, a matter of duty to support me; but they were not in the first instance zealous on my behalf; on the contrary, with few exceptions, languid and mechanical. Paul Muckleworth, indeed, was vigorous enough; he would have voted for a Tory burglar, in preference to a canonized saint whose politics were Liberal.

Apwood worked hard, and did me good service. Folliott worked, if possible, harder, but I am afraid did me as much harm as good by his vehement advocacy. His devotion was, however, praiseworthy. Throwing off his usual listlessness and effeminacy, he scoured the county, knocked up torpid old squires, terrified the clergy by passionate assurances that the Church was in danger, drank cider with the farmers till he was exceedingly poorly, and kissed their wives as often as Apwood told him to do so.

My first essay at speaking to a mob in the open air I shall not easily forget. I had never done such a thing before, but, like the Irishman and his violin, I did not anticipate much diffi-

culty. It was at Stoke-upon-Avon, and, being market-day, the streets were filled with bleating sheep, and impatient oxen, that ever and anon made short rushes at the bystanders. There was no regular market-place; cattle, corn, and sheep, were offered indiscriminately for sale in the High Street. The “Crown and Anchor” inn, from the balcony of which we were to address the mob, was about half way up the street, and looked out upon the thick of the bustle.

There was a preliminary meeting of my friends in a back parlour of the inn. We mustered about thirty, and had hardly seated ourselves, as best we could—some on chairs, some on the sofa, some on the sideboard, and one on a plate-warmer—when the door of the room was flung open, and the landlord and head-waiter entered with two large trays, containing thirty tumblers of stiff brandy-and-water, reeking hot.

It was a sultry day in July, about eleven o’clock in the forenoon, and hot brandy-and-water was the last thing anybody wanted. But nobody seemed surprised. The trays were placed on the ground, in a corner of the room, and nobody touched them, except Folliott, who accidentally

broke three tumblers by treading on them. However, when I came to pay my election bills, brandy-and-water formed a conspicuous item in the account delivered by the landlord of the “Crown and Anchor,” the charge being at the moderate rate of one guinea per glass, or thirty guineas in all. There was also a small charge of two pounds two for cigars. This was Folliott’s fault; he tried one cheroot, and flung it away half smoked. Paul Muckleworth sat on the table, and in his rich, bass voice, laid down the law and sketched the programme of the meeting. It was very important that some one of authority should take the lead, for greater confusion at first, cannot be imagined. Most of the thirty gentlemen belonged to Stoke-upon-Avon or the immediate neighbourhood; and, as is the invariable rule, their whole soul was filled with the notion that the battle of Meadshire was to be fought in Stoke-upon-Avon, a place containing at most about one-twentieth part of the constituency.

“My dear sir,” exclaimed a little man, with prominent eyes and a pointed nose; “my dear sir, have you called on Popkins? Popkins voted wrong last election, but is said to be wavering.

He lives only three miles off—an easy walk. Now do call on Popkins. It would be a splendid hit to call on Popkins!"

"Mr. Phleem, stand by a bit, will ye, please?" interposed Mr. Muggles—a short, burly yeoman—pushing my friend with the pointed nose bodily into the fireplace. "Now, sir, Mr. Chauncey, I've a word to say to you. Look'ee here now. What we want in Stoke is just this: A good, thumping, double-extra tax on that nasty, stinking Yankee cheese! You tell the folk outside that you'll bring in an Act of Parliament for taxing Yankee cheese; that's your game, sir."

And my stout friend gave me a nudge in the ribs that almost sent me into the fireplace after Mr. Phleem. A gaunt, dark-complexioned man, with a chronic cough, now seized me by the button.

"Sir, I'm proud to make your acquaintance. We shall know each other better soon. You will find me a glutton for work. Sir, it was I that organized the great 'anti-public-pump' agitation in Stoke-upon-Avon, in the year '20. Yes, sir, I am the man; and I am proud of it. Pure water is good, sir, but parochial freedom is better.

I am the man that trampled under foot that base plot for making my fellow-townsmen clean by compulsion, and healthy against their wills. Ah! you may trust me, Mr. Chauncey—you may trust me!” He paused to cough; then added—“And, by-the-by, Mr. Chauncey, if you could bring in a little allusion in your speech to the ‘anti-public-pump’ agitation, it would not be amiss. Now, do think of it, Mr. Chauncey; I speak as a friend.”

Paul Muckleworth now thumped the table, shouted “Order, order,” and addressed the company in a tone of solemn exhortation, winding up with the spirit-stirring phrase, that we were “to go it like bricks.”

We marched two and two along the passage to the front room, and emerged on the balcony.

I have said it was market-day, and the street was in a bustle. Farmers, graziers, drovers, market-gardeners, were crowded together immediately in front of the inn, interspersed with a plentiful admixture of dirty-looking men, women, and boys, belonging to the town. The agricultural element predominated, and I had, therefore, a tolerably fair hearing.

Just as Paul Muckleworth was going so speak, who should arrive on the balcony but Sir Claude Cockayne, whom Apwood, by dint of strenuous exertion, had induced to come forward. Sir Claude entered the inn by a back door, and seemed not particularly to enjoy his position, for after complimenting me on my address, which was “highly spoken of at the Carlton,” he chiefly occupied himself in fanning his face with a scented pocket-handkerchief.

“Cut it short, Paul!” was the cry that greeted Muckleworth, before he had spoken ten words. This to my unsophisticated ears seemed uncivil, and rather disconcerted me. Paul Muckleworth, however, took it with perfect indifference. Every interruption, jocose or savage, uttered by the mob, he tossed from him as a massive rock flings back the foam of the advancing waves. Mr. Phleem followed, addressing the multitude in a prolonged screech, which set the oxen off lowing louder than ever. The Rev. Mr. Worritt seconded Phleem, and did it well, in a set speech, learnt by rote, the peroration of which was a little damaged by a carrot, flung by a mischievous juvenile amongst the Radicals, lighting exactly on the top of his

bald head, amidst roars of laughter from friend and foe.

I was received when commencing my speech by a deafening conglomeration of cheers, yells, and groans.

"Take it coolly," said Muckleworth, whose hot breath I felt at the back of my neck. "Take it coolly!"

I paused, and then commenced again, but my voice was drowned in the clamour, and I became hoarser and hoarser.

"Where's Hartley?" shouted a smutty-faced blacksmith, close beneath the balcony, in a stentorian voice. It was the signal for a burst of yelling, mingled with cheers.

An intelligent little man in black, the reporter of the *County Herald*, who was squeezed into an inconceivably small space in the corner of the balcony, and had been endeavouring to catch my eye for the last quarter of an hour, suggested that I should "address myself to the press." At the same time he brandished his note-book and pencil invitingly in my face. I took his advice, and directed my observations exclusively to him. Presently the mob became curious to know what

I was saying ; there was a lull. Unluckily the instant I heard my own voice, my ideas evaporated—I lost my self-possession—the motley scene danced before my eyes, and I thought I was going to break down. With a desperate effort I recovered myself by talking nonsense for a few minutes, and meantime thinking what to say next. The thirty gentlemen on the balcony cheered my nonsense with frantic ecstacy. The farmers below responded. In a voice of thunder Muckleworth roared “Bravo!” I rallied, and delivered myself of a few sentences very creditably. Then a drove of oxen burst through the mob, followed by a litter of pigs, and the uproar swamped my voice once more.

“Chauncey, Chauncey, if you love me,” cried Sir Claude, “bring them to the poll and make an end of it, or I shall faint.”

I took the hint, and wound up by urging “every man, woman and child to be early at the poll !” I unluckily forgot that women and children had no votes. The mob did not forget, and greeted the appeal with a scream of triumphant laughter.

As soon as we had retreated from the balcony I

was congratulated on my successful speech. It was by no means bad for a beginning, and one passage pronounced worthy of being printed in letters of gold. I was pleased to hear it, but a little disappointed when I found the particular passage referred to was where I had spoken nonsense in order to recover my self-possession.

Muckleworth then hurried me off on a canvassing expedition. We were to call on Mr. Juice, the dissenting minister. It was rather a forlorn hope; but Apwood declared that a little stroking down and caressing would do wonders. Mr. Saltmarsh, my good vicar, protested against canvassing a dissenter, and remained in the carriage outside. Mr. Juice's maid stared wildly at the spectacle of a carriage and four, with no end of blue ribbons in the horse's heads, drawn up in front of her master's quiet suburban villa. After some delay we were admitted. Mr. Juice had put on his best Sunday coat, and largest white neck-tie. He sat in an arm-chair, with the light falling very effectively upon the bump of veneration at the top of his bald head, one leg crossed over the other, and his countenance serious, but placid—just as our bishops sit when

expecting a visitor who requires to be gently snubbed.

We made our approaches cautiously ; first praising his garden, then his house, then his study. Folliott went so far as to hazard a compliment to the good looks of the maid-servant, but we kicked him under the table, and he paused. The state of religion in Stoke was next touched upon, and finally the success of Mr. Juice's ministerial labours.

His countenance lost its sternness at the end of the first three minutes, and became mildly compassionate ; then passed into the blandly-cordial ; and finally into the soberly-jocose and familiar. Rising from his arm-chair, Mr. Juice showed us the theological works in his bookcase, particularly a handsome edition of Hooker ; the prints in his portfolio, especially a striking likeness of Bishop Horsley ; a collection of dried caterpillars in various attitudes of torture ; and a bed of pinks in the little flower-garden in front of his house. As we were going—not a word had been said on the real object of our visit—Mr. Juice drew me back into the study, and softly rubbing his hands together, said,—

"I presume, Mr. Chauncey, you will vote for the total abolition of church-rates?"

I reddened, and stammered a confession, that as a genuine Tory, I must stand up in defence of the Church.

"Ah, well; you will give the subject your attention at all events, and perhaps you will read this little work, issued by the 'Church Annihilator Society.' You will find it very good. And how about ejecting the bishops from the House of Lords, Mr. Chauncey? Many of my dear brethren are warm on that point."

I again reddened, and was afraid I could not support a bill for that purpose.

"Ah, well! You will think of it, I hope. I am pleased to have had the honour of being introduced to you, and I think if I vote at all I shall give you a plumper."

We shook hands warmly, and drove off in triumph. But a few days after, I discovered a fact that considerably damped my gratification. My friend, Mr. Juice, did not happen to have a vote for the county.

Then we visited a small yeoman living in a small farmhouse with a small field attached to

it. This man kept us two hours before he would promise his vote, and, after all, we were not sure of him.

"Dwon't ye know, Squire Chauncey, I be a freeholder, and father afore me? Aye, aye, and I'll niver gee my vote wi' my eyes shut! Begummers, I oodn't if the finest gennelman in England axed me. Na, I oodn't, Mr. Apwood. It's nonsical to 'spect it. I tell thee I oodn't. Now do ye, Squire Chauncey, come nist the fire, and tell I summut more. Dwon't be 'frunted, Squire Chauncey, dwon't be 'frunted. But I be a freeholder, and father war too, and gramfer afore us; which all dree on us voted blue, but we all o's knawed why fust. Ees, all o's. Come, squire, I bag your pardon, but oon't ye take drop cider? Do ye now, and tell I summut more o' politics. Do ye now!"

The day was well nigh spent, but we paid one more visit. It was to the rector of the next parish; a tall, dry, austere-looking man, who, the moment we were all safe in his library, took down a voluminous work on the Apocalypse, and put us through a regular examination.

We should have got out of it very well, if it had not been for my vicar; who, although we

pinched him black and blue, would persist in contradicting every other word the rector said, until it ended in a violent altercation, and our abrupt dismissal from the house, with the pleasant assurance from the rector that he would rather cut off his right hand than promote the return of so heterodox a candidate.

We dined with a retired wine-merchant near Stoke. He was a hearty man, and, carried away by political enthusiasm, was perpetually slapping me on the back, and exclaiming—"Cheer up, Mr. Chauncey, you are all right, sir!" a mode of treatment I have always particularly disliked, and which, at any other time, I should have resented in a way that would have greatly surprised my friend. We dined on the fat of the land. I think I never saw so many dishes crowded together on one table. Sir Claude Cockayne, who was of the party, found the spectacle too much for him, and retired bodily before the second course was removed.

Paul Muckleworth, Folliott, the vicar, our host, and myself, were merry enough over the day's adventures. Apwood seemed absent at first, but after some glasses of unexceptionable champagne,

rallied and talked as usual in his good-humoured, but rather provincial fashion.

After dinner, we all rose at the request of our host, and withdrew to another apartment, he leading the way. Here was spread a table with dessert and wine, where we passed more time than I liked. There were six kinds of port on the table, of different shades of colour, from that of Warren's jet blacking, to a pale yellow. I have never liked port wine since. Then came tea, handed round by a maid, whose jaunty cap was adorned with the everlasting "true blue" ribbons, and to bed early, with the prospect of another day's speechifying and canvassing twenty miles off.

Comparatively, this is a bright page out of the history of that long and dreary election contest. Very soon the animosity of my opponents became more bitter; personal insults more frequent; libellous newspaper attacks and impudent hand-bills multiplied. I was mobbed in one or two of the larger towns, and hooted whenever I drove through the manufacturing or mining districts of the county. The contest waxed more furious as the day of nomination approached. There were

apprehensions of some violent disturbance. The cavalry at Highbury barracks were cautioned to hold themselves in readiness, and the Mayor of Smelterstown, where the hustings were erected, began to swear in special constables.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE HUSTINGS.

IT was with no ordinary anxiety that I started on the day of nomination, with Folliott, Paul Muckleworth, and Apwood, at the head of as many of my own and my neighbour's tenantry as we could muster, for the hustings at Smelters-town, some ten miles distant. It was agreed that Rosamund should remain at home, for warm work was expected. She behaved with admirable fortitude, though when the horses came to the door, her sudden paleness showed the secret anxiety she was suffering.

Our cavalcade being drawn up in some degree of order, the enthusiastic Mr. Paul Muckleworth gave the signal for a lusty cheer, and off we set at a steady trot, Rosamund's handkerchief fluttering from the drawing-room window, all the dogs

on the premises barking in chorus, and the gardeners in the lawn taking off their hats and waving them in the air, like young “Puffendorf” in the *Rovers*, with an air of not exactly knowing why.

We picked up other detachments of mounted supporters along the road, but were joined by few of the gentry. Many of those who had talked the loudest, and promised the most, now hung back, either from lack of zeal, or from alarm at the violence of the opposition offered to me. At Snelterstown, Sir Claude Cockayne hovered about the outskirts of the mob in an elegant green chariot, with footmen in brilliant livery, now here and now there, like a butterfly of uncertain habits, but at length gave it up, and drove briskly homewards. Mr. Martin Martin was waiting for us in the hustings, also Eustace Pole, and a batch of squires, with a sprinkling of clergy, but not many.

The wide open square in the centre of the town, where the hustings stood, was densely crowded. The trees on each side of the square, were black with men and boys clustered in the branches. The windows and roofs of the houses

seemed perfectly alive. The confused roar of the densely-wedged crowd, the braying of a couple of brass bands parading up and down the adjacent streets, and ever and anon some tremendous cheer from the "yellows," and counter-cheers from the "blues;"—all this tended rather to excite the calmest of us. However, having put up our horses at the "Blue" inn, Muckleworth, Folliott, myself and the rest formed a compact column, and made a rush for the hustings: it was the signal for a regular fight.

Fortunately for myself, I was surrounded by my own people, and heard only yells of fury, and rattling of bludgeons and heavy-handled horse-whips on all sides. The twelve special constables were bonneted early in the day, and disappeared from the scene. Fighting, shoving, shouting, we gained ground gradually, and at length were safely landed on the hustings amidst cheers and counter-cheers which I thought would never end. Looking about me I found Folliott by my side; he at least of my many professed friends was true to me. Stones and dirt were occasionally flung from the crowd, but Folliott stood by me without flinching, his dress torn and disordered by the

recent scuffle, his hat broken, and his face smeared with the blood of a wound on the forehead from a flagstaff. Muckleworth had disappeared, having been stunned by a blow from a bludgeon. A few of my side still clung to me, but the group at that end of the hustings was thinning.

Far and wide beneath me stretched a wilderness of human faces, upturned with looks of hatred and fury, towards the spot where I stood, yelling defiance without intermission. Banners with absurd inscriptions flaunted in the wind. Moveable placards with words of insult printed in gigantic characters, offensive devices, such as a figure of Jack Ketch strangling a culprit labelled "Chauncey." I gathered such complimentary expressions as "butcher," "gallowsbird," "murderer," hurled at me from time to time, but the clamour was for the most part like the roar of a menagerie—wild senseless rage, and nothing more.

The under-sheriff, in the absence of the "high," who was ill, hurried through the usual formalities, and for a few seconds was heard imploring a fair hearing for both parties; then the waves of sound closed over his voice, and the rest was

lost. Our committee of management had prudently occupied the ground early by a compact body of farmers and other country folk, together with a band of hired bludgeon men primed with drink. This kept the mob of Yellows, who greatly outnumbered the Blues, at some little distance from the front of the hustings. On our left the Yellows outflanked us. Their clamour and abuse tried our patience not a little, but when they began saluting us with volleys of gravel and small stones, our position grew seriously uncomfortable.

“Why, it’s a regular pillory!” exclaimed Folliott. “Pass the word down to our fellows, and let us charge those blackguards on the left, and make a clear space!”

“Hold, for Heaven’s sake!” remonstrated Apwood. “They are three to one!”

Folliott, disregarding him, continued to shout to my supporters nearest the hustings,—

“Now, my lads, look to your bludgeons, and let us have a slap at the Yellows.”

Nothing loath were “the lads.” But I interposed with energy,—

“Folliott, this is a schoolboy folly. Whatever

you do, don't turn my tenants into policemen ; better send for the dragoons than that!"

"Right!" cried Apwood, in an excited voice. "Right! Hold your own ; but don't strike a blow. I will be back in half an hour."

He squeezed my hand, but before I could speak, had disappeared.

"The man's a coward!" exclaimed Folliott. "Let him go ; we are better without him."

At this moment, however, the uproar and violence of the mob subsided for a brief space. Vaughan's voice was heard seconding the sheriff in his endeavour to procure a hearing for the speakers on both sides. Then two gentlemen from the neighbourhood, one of them in business, proposed and seconded Vaughan, but chiefly in dumb show, for the clamour soon burst forth again.

Folliott proposed me. His face, as I have said, was smeared with blood, and his dress in disorder. The mob received him with shouts of laughter and a volley of jokes ; he was recommended to run home to his mother to have his face washed ; a halfpenny was flung at him to buy a "ha'porth of plaster."

But Folliott had recovered his good-humour ;

he did not care for laughter, and laughed as loud as any one. He caught the halfpenny, and very deliberately put it in his purse; he took out his pocket-handkerchief, and in a leisurely way tied it round his wounded head. Then, waving his battered hat politely to the crowd, exclaimed,—

“Now, gentlemen, I am ready for you,” and talked away, for twenty minutes, with tolerable success.

Eustace Pole followed, and got on very well until interrupted by a small boy of six, perched on an adjacent tree, who requested him to “spit it out faster.” Whereupon, Eustace Pole lost his presence of mind instantly, and, as usual, began to stutter. “Shout, ‘Chauncey for ever,’ and shut up!” cried Folliott, in his ear, and Eustace Pole gratefully complied with the suggestion.

Vaughan now stood forwards. For some moments his voice was inaudible; but on a sudden there was silence in the whole square—he had uttered the name of Hartley. He enumerated his good qualities, his contempt for meanness and trickery, his hatred of injustice, his fierce but excusable passion when successful villainy crossed his path.

Vaughan spoke in measured accents, slowly and forcibly. I gazed on his countenance. It was, as I have said, handsome, but austere and harsh. A regular flow of emotion varied the expression of his features as he proceeded. It was an honest mind of no small power, ordinarily stern and tranquil, now disturbed, but not mastered, by the energy of a strong passion.

He said that Hartley was his relative. He was more, he was his friend.

“I don’t ask you,” continued Vaughan, “to send me to Parliament for my own sake, but out of respect to the memory of James Hartley. Personally, I have but one claim on your good will, and it is this, I am an honest man. But Hartley’s claims were many and strong. You loved him. You were horrified at his sudden and mysterious death—you will not treat his memory lightly—you will not desert his friend—you will stand by me, and place me at the top of the poll. Because, if Hartley could speak, I am the man he would name to take his place.”

The energy with which Vaughan spoke, deeply affected that large assembly. Even my own supporters applauded him. Cheers rose in succes-

sive volumes of sound from all parts. My heart sank, and it was with an effort that I roused myself to address the multitude. There was silence for a few seconds ; but my voice was like a spark falling into a heap of gunpowder. One shriek of hatred filled the air. The great body of the mob furiously pressed upon our people in front of the hustings. The only man who had any influence, was Vaughan ; he shouted, gesticulated, kept the “yellows” on his side of the hustings in check. In front, the struggle came to an end for lack of space —all were so locked and jammed together that there was no room to use a weapon.

But on our left the case was different : here was a regular hand-to-hand fight between “yellows” and “blues.” Now the “blues” consisted of many of my own tenantry, with a picked band of bludgeon-men. The “yellows” were beaten back, and fled in disorder, unable to stand against the heavy weapons of our people. But the combat was only suspended for a moment ; the discomfited “yellows” rallied, and, reinforced by a body of miners, advanced once more to the attack. A bloody and desperate struggle seemed imminent, when a thought seized me. I would

withdraw my people, and throw myself on the generosity of the mob. Folliott, and those about me, reluctantly acquiesced. I made our men fall back, and draw off towards the rear of the hustings; then, partly by my voice, partly by signs, I made the mob understand that I placed myself in their hands, and only asked for a fair hearing. Vaughan himself seconded my endeavours; and when, by the entire withdrawal of my supporters from that end of the hustings, the mob saw the space left open for them to occupy, and myself standing almost alone patiently waiting to address them, their feelings towards me manifestly changed. With a cheer they pushed forwards, took possession of the ground abandoned by my partisans, and surged up against the hustings a dense mass, rude and disorderly enough, but well disposed to hear me. The better feeling spread through the body of the multitude in front. My frank confidence and courage told upon them, as it ever will on the hearts of Englishmen.

I was now almost entirely surrounded by a vast assemblage of men, who a few moments before were uttering the fiercest imprecations against

me, and were bent upon violent outrage. A narrow line of my supporters still indeed occupied the ground in front of the hustings, but in case of an onslaught could only serve the purpose of a sort of temporary breakwater to the mob. But the mob had become singularly quiet and orderly. It was like a huge animal holding its breath. There was a general hush. I felt that now or never was the moment to disabuse the minds of these misguided men, and clear my character before the world.

The intensity of my emotion, and the great interests at stake, gave me on that occasion a boldness and freedom of utterance that I have seldom since attained. Conscious of the scene around me, I saw the great assemblage, noticed the varying countenances upraised towards me, gleaming white in the sunshine, heard the shouts, now of applause, now of reprobation. But the consciousness of external things was subordinate to the flow of my thoughts, and the ringing words in which I gave them utterance. My manly remonstrance against the base injustice with which I had been treated—the indignant scorn with which I flung from me the foul calumnies cast

upon my character—the temperate, but earnest vindication of my conduct to Hartley, as I pointed out to the attentive multitude the mark of his horse-whip on my neck, visible to those near me—had a favourable effect upon the majority. They wavered, and at times applauded.

I protested my sorrow for the death of Hartley, denounced the inquest as a cowardly political dodge, threw myself upon their sense of justice, and asked them to give a verdict in my favour by electing me their member.

Carried away by my feelings, I raised my face upwards, as if calling Heaven to witness my sincerity; I stretched out my hands, as if adjuring the multitude to believe me. My heart swelled with pardonable gratification as the air rang with cheers that seemed the pledge of my approaching triumph.

The applause had scarcely subsided, when, in the lull that ensued, a distant clamour struck upon my ear, each moment becoming louder. The quarter whence it issued, was the long, irregular street, forming the principal approach to the square in which we were assembled. The noise was sharp and metallic—the rattle of wheels,

and clash of horses' hoofs, along the rough paving of the street.

My first glance lighted upon the figure of Rosamund, in an open carriage, leaning forwards with a countenance of keen anxiety. Strangely at variance was that beautiful face, full of the terror of love, with the coarse and reckless multitude spread over the square.

But what did I behold, that sent a thrill of bitter grief and vexation through my heart? There, advancing at a rapid trot, on one side of the carriage, the front files of a troop of dragoons, with drawn sabres flashing in the sun! The carriage drew up, and the dragoons formed line in front of it, on the outskirts of the mob.

All this passed in a few seconds of time. A low, deep murmur ran through the multitude, with the rapidity of an electric shock. Then burst from all sides a shout, or rather roar, of rage and imprecation.

There are times when the mind, in presence of sudden and unforeseen disaster, grasps, in one instant, all the results that must spring from it. So it was with me.

I saw my newly-awakened hopes scattered to

the winds, and the good-will and sympathy of the multitude again turned to gall and bitterness—contempt and hatred.

All that I had done, all that I had said that morning, was instantly set down as base hypocrisy—a trick merely to gain time, and keep the people quiet until the soldiers could be brought up. My carriage and liveries were well known; Rosamund, herself, was no stranger to many present. Moreover, from the inn, at the corner of the street, my friend and supporter, Paul Muckleworth, recovered from the effects of the injury he had received that morning, issued, with several of the gentry whom the violence of the mob had frightened from the hustings, and greeted the cavalry officers with triumphant hilarity.

“Chauncey,” cried Folliott, “I wish those ridiculous dragoons were at the bottom of the Red Sea! Who on earth could have sent ‘em here?”

Meantime the multitude were swayed to and fro with a violent convulsion of rage; stones flew at the soldiers on the one side, and towards the hustings on the other. I heard Vaughan’s voice imploring the people to hold their hands, and keep the peace. Many even of my opponents urged

me to make my escape down the steps at the back of the hustings. Suddenly the whole weight of the mob was swung, as if by one common instinct, upon the band of my supporters in front, drove them to the right and left, or trampled them under foot, and surged up, like raging waves of the sea, against the wooden structure on which we stood. Amidst the deafening clamour, it was almost impossible to make each other heard, but with one consent we rushed to the rude plank door at the top of the steps behind us. It was locked on the outside! Stones, sticks, fragments of coal and rubbish, fell thickly amongst friends and foes. The mob swarmed over the railing in front of us, and up the stairs on either side. Hideous faces, swollen with rage, glared at us open-mouthed; and bludgeons, iron bars, tools of husbandry, or from the mines, were brandished over our heads. In sheer despair we closed with our assailants, and grappled for our lives; but there was no space to use either fist or bludgeon—jammed into a struggling mass, it was not so much a fight, as a convulsive effort for self-preservation—the man who fell would never rise from the ground alive. Vaughan, and his supporters on the hustings, were

enveloped in the same wild tide, sparing neither friend nor foe, and all swept with a great shock against the wooden barrier at the back. It bent, cracked, split into fifty fragments. Over we went, shouting and screaming, and fell to the ground beneath—a struggling heap of terrified human beings. Fortunately the height from which we fell was not much, and beyond kicks and bruises, and in one instance a broken collar-bone, the injuries sustained were not serious. As for myself, young and active, I quickly extricated myself from the chaos of legs and arms, in which for a moment I seemed to be entangled, and, gaining my feet, pushed my way out of the thick of the throng, and then paused to take breath.

Casting my eyes over the square, I perceived the dragoons were quietly, but effectually, clearing the space in front of the hustings. No unnecessary violence was used, and beyond a great deal of yelling and hooting, and an occasional shower of dirt or gravel, no resistance offered.

The bulk of the mob being driven down the adjacent streets, the dilapidated hustings began to be reoccupied by the supporters of the two candidates.

Vaughan, addressing himself to the officer in command of the dragoons, undertook, that if he withdrew his men, the mob should keep the peace. The officer behaved very well, and drew off the dragoons to a convenient distance. The scattered multitude speedily reassembled. Vaughan addressed them with energy, and so far succeeded in pacifying them, that they promised not to interrupt the business of the meeting, provided I did not continue my speech. Gentlemen of both sides gathered round me, and begged me for my own sake, and for the sake of the public peace, to withdraw. With a heavy heart I yielded to their importunities, and quietly descended from the hustings. Fortunately, a crowd of my own supporters filled the space between the hustings and the street where my carriage was posted, and I threaded my way without much difficulty. I found, however, that the carriage was removed to the farther end of the street. I hastened forwards, but had not proceeded far, when, from a lane that crossed it at right angles, emerged a sallow-faced little gentleman, mounted on a stout pony. It was Ferris, who was either too late for the meeting, or had prudently taken refuge in a

place of safety, until the storm had blown over. He craned his head over the pony's neck to get a good view of me, wheeled round abruptly, and wrenching off the blue cockade that adorned his button-hole, stuffed it into his pocket, and, sticking his heels into his pony's sides, cantered away up the lane with looks of profound apprehension.

I called to mind the state of my dress, and my general appearance. My hat gone, my hair dishevelled, my face scratched and bleeding, my clothes torn and covered with dust, it was no wonder that the bustling little banker had taken me for one of the most riotous of the mob, and had fled in alarm.

I walked as fast as my bruised and weary limbs permitted to the end of the street, and came suddenly upon the carriage. It had been drawn round the corner to be out of sight. Rosamund had descended, and, her quick eye detecting me, despite my forlorn and disordered appearance, she instantly clasped me in her arms, greatly to the astonishment of David, who, like Ferris, mistaking me for one of the "rebels," as he termed the "yellows," had cocked a huge horse-pistol, with the intention of summarily disposing of me.

We waited a few minutes to hear the result of the show of hands, and then drove home. As might have been anticipated, the show of hands was greatly in Vaughan's favour, but a poll was of course demanded.

CHAPTER XV.

A SORRY TRIUMPH.

How came the dragoons to the place of nomination? My bitterest and most artful enemy could not have done me a greater injury.

It was Apwood. Mistaken zeal, and, I was compelled to admit, a sudden access of unworthy terror, had driven him to commit this sad, this irretrievable blunder; such, at least, was my impression at the time.

It appeared that the sheriff, in a state of much trepidation, left those magistrates who chanced to be present, to take measures for maintaining the peace. Apwood, on leaving the hustings, repaired to the hotel where certain magistrates in the "blue" interest had taken refuge, and from them, thus vested with discretionary power by the sheriff, he obtained authority, in writing,

to summon the dragoons. Off he galloped to Highbury barracks; but not content with this display of officious zeal, had the imprudence to call at Glenarvon, and startle the inmates by the intelligence that there was a bloody riot at Smelterstown, that I was in peril of my life, and that the military had been called out.

Having told his story in an incoherent manner, Apwood sank into a chair, and declared he was too ill to return to Smelterstown. He had had a fall, so he informed Rosamund, in leaping a fence, and was much shaken. All he could do was to advise the carriage to be sent for me. Nor did he dissuade Rosamund from her resolution of going herself to the scene of the riot, and bringing me home, either alive or dead. The shock of his fall, and the excitement of the day, had utterly deprived him of sense and judgment.

I had not the heart to reveal to my wife the irreparable damage sustained by the sudden appearance of the dragoons, simultaneously with herself, at the very moment when I had at length made an impression on the multitude, and was carrying their sympathies with me.

The dinner party at Glenarvon that day was

large. Friends dropped in uninvited; political supporters called to report progress, or obtain instructions; the old mansion was pervaded by the buzz of many voices and the trampling of many feet.

From the walls of the great hall the faces of my ancestors seemed to look down with an air of calm inquiry and mild surprise. All the evening Rosamund was hemmed in by enthusiastic lady friends, amongst whom the vicar's lady, who deemed Toryism a scriptural virtue, and Mrs. Paul Muckleworth, a fiercer politician than her husband, shone forth conspicuous. Up to their knees in blue cockades, the ladies worked away at banners and streamers, inscribing in characters of dazzling hue, such battle-cries as "Chauncey and Chivalry!" "Chauncey and Church and State!" &c. The men were quite as busy. Apwood had gone home, but Folliott took his place, and worked with a will. Eustace Pole, clever with his pen, wrote spicy articles for the *Meadshire Mercury*. Paul Muckleworth, whose head ached from the rough usage of the morning, lay on the sofa, and growled out reluctant approbation, or surly contradiction, as the case required.

Long after the last of our visitors had either departed or turned in, we were not allowed to rest. From time to time, as scattered parties returning from the nomination passed along the high road at the foot of our grounds, hoarse shouts of defiance and hatred reached our ears, borne upon the breezes of the night, and sent a thrill of alarm through Rosamund's breast.

Next night there was a great gathering of the Radicals at Downend Common by torchlight. Alarm was caused to the whole neighbourhood when it was first announced, and two companies of infantry, at the instigation of the lord-lieutenant, were posted within a convenient distance of the spot.

But the meeting was summoned, not to incite, but to prevent, disorder and disturbance. Personally, and by means of printed circulars, Vaughan urged his friends and supporters to pursue a course of tactics, which should frustrate the evil hopes of their enemies, and secure his triumph.

What that course was the first day's polling speedily revealed. Perfect order and tranquillity reigned throughout the county, so far as the

Radical party were concerned. It seemed as if Vaughan had imparted to every one his own business-like determination and calm energy. Even banners and placards were abandoned. There was no music—there was no cheering—the Radical voters marched to the poll in stern silence: wrath smouldered beneath, but outwardly all was peace.

After the first few hours even ladies ventured to the neighbourhood of the polling-booths. Our own people caught the infection, and the common sort would, I verily believe, have lost all interest in the election, from the total absence of excitement, had it not been for the drink which flowed freely at every public-house and beer-house “chartered” by the Blues.

What with bad roads and a hilly country, it was not till the afternoon that the committees of either Vaughan or myself could collect the returns from the different polling-booths, and make public the state of the poll. As I had fully expected, Vaughan was far ahead, the numbers being:—

Vaughan	1,711
Herbert Chauncey	1,429
Majority for Vaughan .	282

Nothing but unwonted vigour and perseverance could, in a constituency of under 5,000, pull down such a majority as this. But on the whole, I was inclined to believe, that the very probability of my defeat, now evident to all the Tory party, might prove the means of securing success. From all quarters, information reached our central committee rooms, that the tenant farmers were holding back, and in some instances positively voting against me.

The country gentlemen were exceedingly indignant. It became not merely a question between Vaughan and myself—an iron manufacturer or a squire; it was a struggle between landlord and tenant. The squirearchy, as I had foreseen, woke up at last to a true appreciation of its position. It shook itself like an unwieldy animal suddenly roused, stared wildly, and then set to work with energy to secure my seat, and vindicate its own authority. That night there was great galloping to and fro—eager conferences—violent canvassing—a vast deal of money spent and liquor drunk. Meantime the screw was applied to doubtful or refractory tenants with an unflinching hand. The polling next day began

with great vigour. Our people showed in greater force, and, thanks to the public-houses, in better spirits. Bands of music stunned the ear with brazen uproar ; flags and banners, gaudy with gilt inscriptions, dazzled the eye ; dashing equipages, filled with elegantly dressed ladies, added to the gaiety and animation of the scene ; the landed gentry and their agents rode to the poll, followed by troops of mounted tenantry, who were expected to “do their duty.”

Rosamund insisted on accompanying me to several of the polling-booths. Her carriage was surrounded by youthful squires, vying to do her service ; the wives of the leading gentry paid homage to her ; it was esteemed an honour to obtain from her a word, or even a glance. Wherever she went, the Blue mob cheered madly, and more than once attempted to unharness the horses, and draw the carriage themselves.

Strange, indeed, was the contrast between that scene, and many it has been my misfortune to witness since ! But, for the time, all was shallow enthusiasm, giddy excitement, and fictitious popularity. It was in vain.

True, by twelve o'clock that day the numbers stood thus:—

Vaughan	2,032
Herbert Chauncey	1,989
Majority for Vaughan .	43

True, that by one o'clock we were neck and neck. But the strength of the Tory party was almost exhausted.

At Stoke-upon-Avon, Folliott came galloping up to Rosamund's carriage, exclaiming that the day was ours.

I had just sprung in, weary and dejected, to rest myself for a few minutes.

"My good fellow," I said, "we have not eighty voters left, and there are four hundred Radicals unpolled!"

"Oh!" cried Folliott, "the four hundred are sick—in prison—in Bedlam—dead and buried, depend upon it."

"Then these are their ghosts, I presume," I answered, pointing to a strong body of voters approaching the polling-booth in perfect silence, but with looks of steady determination. No band preceded them. Each man wore the yellow ro-

sette distinguishing Vaughan's supporters, whilst, in the van, waved a banner of the same colour, with "Vaughan, the friend of Hartley!" inscribed on it. I noticed also that the men had crape round their hats, in mourning, as I presumed, for Hartley.

"Ghosts!" cried Folliott; "I wish I could exorcise them. At all events, I'll make the rascals take the bribery oath. It will gain time," and he galloped off towards the polling-booth.

"Herbert," said Rosamund, "speak to those men. They seem honest and intelligent. I am sure they would vote for you if you asked them. Never mind me, I am not nervous. Speak to them."

She laid her hand on my arm, and looked into my face with mingled confidence and affection.

"My love," I answered, gravely, "do you know who those men are? They are poor Hartley's tenants."

She was silenced at once. For many reasons that name affected her painfully. There was a mystery hanging over it which she could not solve. The fracas between him and myself, the cause of which could never be explicitly divulged

to her ; the intended duel ; his sudden death ; the inquest that followed and formed the climax of these unfortunate events ; were subjects that troubled her more deeply than I was then aware of. We drove to another polling-booth.

Meantime Apwood did not make his appearance. He was too unwell to leave his house. Very early, however, on the second day of the polling, a note from him was put into my hands, written in trembling characters. He earnestly recommended me to fight out the election to the last. From information he had received, he felt justified in assuring me that Vaughan, even if successful, would be unseated on petition.

I persuaded Rosamund to drive home, being anxious to ride over to Brookvale Cottage, and ascertain how far the statement in Apwood's note could be relied upon. Our friends were looking exceedingly downcast, and not a few of them were stealthily dropping off, and making for home. Hired ragamuffins still, however, paraded the streets, shouting "True Blue for ever!" till they were hoarse, and inebriated bands of music wandered to and fro, playing perseveringly out of tune.

Just as I quitted Smelterstown, I heard the Yellows give three lusty cheers. It was the state-of the poll:—

Vaughan	2,381
Chauncey	2,377

Then all was once more tranquillity, and a fresh batch of Yellow voters advanced to poll, passing along a lane made for them through the multitude; I sprang on my horse and rode off with a feeling of keen, and, I fear, for the moment, savage disappointment and annoyance in my heart.

On reaching Brookvale Cottage, I dismounted at the garden gate, and, throwing my horse's rein to the groom, walked up to the house. The shutters were all closed save those of one window, through which I saw a mournful row of medicine bottles, placed a little ostentatiously on the dressing-table. I rang the bell, and the maid, who opened the door without undoing the chain, speaking in a whisper, informed me that Mr. Apwood had been suffering greatly since noon that day, and was allowed to see no one but the doctor, who was at that moment upstairs.

Somewhat puzzled at this sudden aggravation of

Apwood's illness, I asked the doctor's name, proposing to speak to him.

"Sure, your honour, 'tis Dr. Crawdle. He do always attend master."

Annoyed at the name of Crawdle, of inquest notoriety, I left the house hastily, and rode back towards Smelterstown. The sun was declining towards the west, and the shadows of the hedge-rows of the green lane along which my horse was cantering, made a quiet twilight round me. Harassed and weary, all I now wished for was rest. The election fight would soon be over, and I could fling to the wind the reminiscences of the last few weeks. The thought seemed to soothe and tranquillize my mind, still vibrating with the shock of recent excitement, and I gently urged my horse forward with the determination of at once riding home, and taking no further part in a struggle which I knew to be hopeless. The horse, a favourite hunter, seemed to feel the improvement in my spirits, and bounded forward as if fresh from the stable. My groom behind could not keep up with me, and on diverging into the main road I pulled up to wait for him.

From the direction of Smelterstown, however, another horseman was approaching at a gallop amidst a cloud of dust. He reined in suddenly on recognizing me, and thrust a note into my hand. It was from Paul Muckleworth, hastily scribbled in pencil.

“ Central Committee-room,
Smelterstown.

“ DEAR H. C.

“ It is all right! Vaughan is arrested for debt, and has resigned. There has been a bit of a row; but the soldiers have restored order. You are M.P. for Meadshire, and True Blue is triumphant. God bless you.

“ Ever yours,

“ P. M.”

Bewildered by this unexpected intelligence, I turned my horse's head towards Smelterstown, and galloped at full speed, followed at a more moderate pace by the messenger and my groom. I perceived as I entered the town all the shutters up in the shop-windows. Women and children were gazing out of upper windows, and there was an expression of alarm and anxiety in the countenances of the few persons I met in the main street.

I slackened my horse's speed, and rode quietly into the market-place.

A large crowd, consisting chiefly of the Tory party, filled the space immediately in front of the polling-booth. On the right hand, opposite the Feathers Hotel, where our committee sat, I noticed, to my regret, a long red line of infantry. Sentries were thrown out to keep back the crowd in front, and in the rear there appeared a group of prisoners in charge of a subaltern's guard. The windows of the inn were completely smashed. Broken articles of furniture strewed the ground in front, whilst a black stain of smoke extending upwards from two or three of the windows, intimated that the house had been partially on fire. There was an unusual stillness in the crowd, and I could hear the loud wailing of some women, probably friends or relatives of the prisoners, as I approached. But as my eye glanced round, I perceived a sight, which, at that particular moment, chilled me through and through. On the pavement was a small crimson pool of blood, lit up by the rays of the setting sun. Moreover, the air was heavy with the smell of gunpowder. It was with the gravest apprehension that I pressed

into the crowd. A buzz passed through the square, and all faces were turned towards me. It was not, however, a look of triumphant greeting that met me ; it was rather that of distress and perplexity.

But at that instant the church bells set up a merry peal, and a band of musicians came reeling forth from a public-house in an adjoining street playing “ See the conquering Hero comes ! ”

A few gentlemen and farmers on horseback spurred to the front, and tried to get up a cheer. The cheer was feeble, but it was better than nothing. I took off my hat in silent acknowledgment of the compliment, and hastened to the hotel to learn particulars of what had occurred.

It was true that Vaughan had been arrested for debt, and was now in the hands of the bailiffs at Stoke-upon-Avon. He had immediately communicated with the sheriff and withdrawn from the contest, though in another hour his majority would have been a clear hundred. The dragoons had been despatched to Stoke in anticipation of an outbreak, but meantime a furious riot had broken out at Smelterstown. The mob, mad with rage and disappointment, ill informed as to the

facts, and proclaiming that Vaughan had been basely betrayed and entrapped, made a determined onslaught on the Feathers Hotel. Resistance was in vain. The Blue committee fled over roofs and out of back windows. Every man with a vestige of blue about him was beaten and maltreated. The house was plundered, sacked, and finally set on fire.

There were two companies of infantry a short distance from the town. Paul Muckleworth brought them up; prisoners were made, but the mob rallied to the rescue. Paul Muckleworth read the Riot Act amidst a hurricane of brickbats.

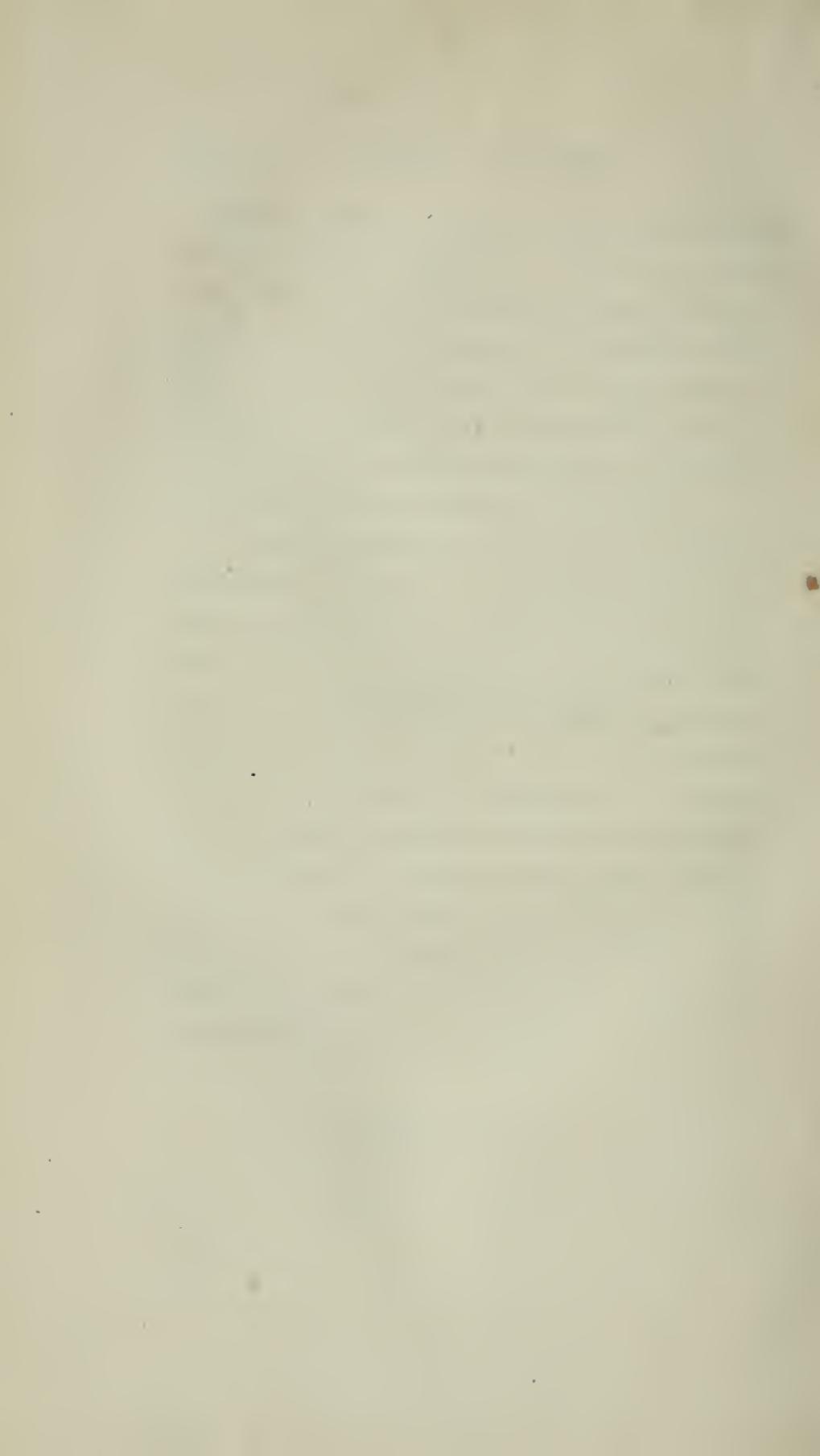
Every effort was made, but made in vain, to induce the misguided multitude to disperse. They pressed forwards with increasing fury. The soldiers were formed in sections: the leading section fired twice—first, blank cartridge, then ball. There was no need to fire again. Panic-struck, the rioters turned and fled, leaving upon the ground one man dead, and six or seven more or less wounded.

It was a sad, and to me a heart-rending, calamity. Had I been present, possibly it might have been averted. But the catastrophe was wholly

unforeseen. The disturbance broke out, reached its climax, was suppressed, within the space of one short hour. Certainly I was in no ways responsible for it; I lament it to this day. Yet, often has this unfortunate affair been thrown in my teeth by political and personal foes, and paraded before the world as an outrage more savage and ruthless than the massacre of Peterloo.

It was not wonderful that the popular party in Meadshire—electors and non-electors—firm, patient, and magnanimous, as they had proved themselves during the whole of the polling, should have given way to uncontrollable fury when the man of their choice, at the moment when success seemed certain, was defeated and disgraced by a stroke of what seemed to them the blackest treachery. The blood spilt at Smelterstown gave a deeper intensity to their passion, and nothing but the strong force of military now poured into the district by orders of Government, could have preserved the peace of the county.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY SMITH, ELDER AND CO.,
LITTLE GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY, E.C.



65, Cornhill, London,
April, 1860.

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OF

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